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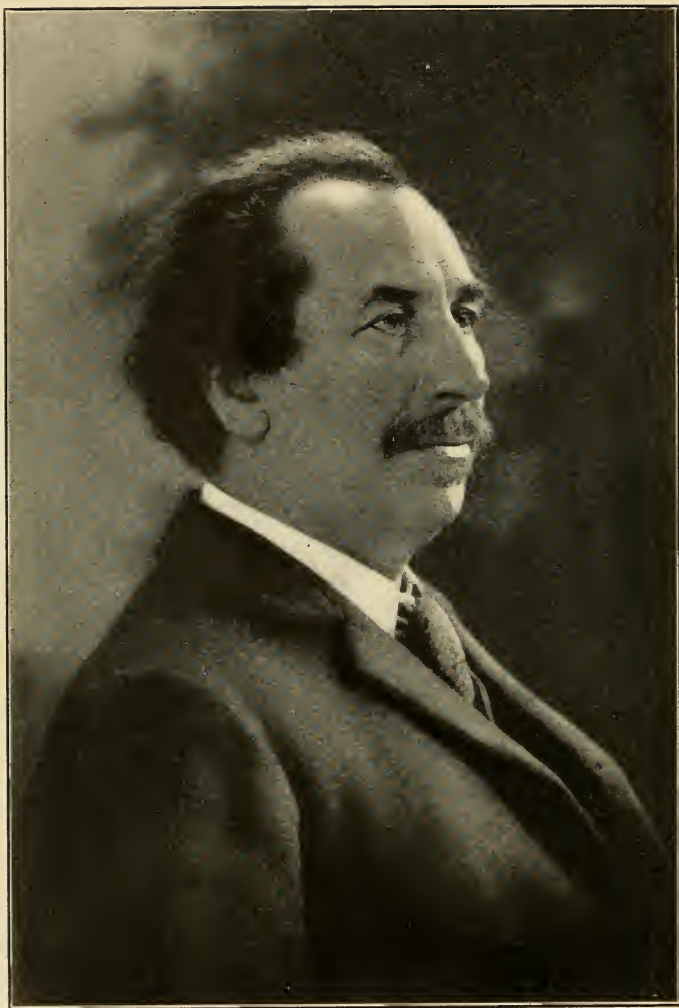
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The evangelistic note





Yours Very Truly  
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# The Evangelistic Note

BY  
W. J. Dawson

*Author of*  
"The Reproach of Christ," "The Life of Christ,"  
"The Threshold of Manhood," etc.



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THIS VOLUME  
IS INSCRIBED WITH THE NAME OF THE  
MOST LOYAL OF FRIENDS,  
NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS,

AND IS DEDICATED TO HIM,  
AND THE GENEROUS PEOPLE OF PLYMOUTH CHURCH, BROOKLYN,  
AMONG WHOM I FOUND SO MUCH  
GRACIOUS HOSPITALITY AND ENCOURAGEMENT,  
AND REMEMBER  
WITH CONSTANT GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION.



## PREFACE

THE essay with which this book commences sufficiently explains the thoughts, emotions, and circumstances in which the book has found its origin.

The addresses which it contains were in all but three instances delivered in the course of my mission at Plymouth Church, Brooklyn. As they were in the main extempore utterances, my only way of giving them permanence has been to consult the columns of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, in which verbatim reports appeared. I had no opportunity of revising these daily reports, and while my hearty thanks are due to the skill of the reporter, it will be easily conceived that many verbal errors and some misinterpretations of thought occurred. These errors and misinterpretations I have now corrected. Nevertheless I have thought it wise not to alter the form of the addresses. They remain addresses; they are not essays.

The addresses in this volume which were not actually delivered to American audiences are two: that upon "Christ Among the Common Things of Life," and the address on "Saving

Faith.” The first was, however, printed in the *Brooklyn Eagle* on the day preceding the Plymouth mission, and the second touches a side of religious truth which is consonant with the general scheme of the book. I have therefore included it in preference to the address delivered at the University of Chicago, which dealt with issues afterward treated more fully in the addresses at Plymouth Church.

The address on “ Self-Reservation ” was delivered to the students of Yale University, New Haven.

W. J. DAWSON.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE EVANGELISTIC NOTE . . . . .	11
II. THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE .	62
III. OUR DUTY TO THE BYSTANDER . . . . .	82
IV. THE UNAVOIDABLE CHRIST . . . . .	98
V. THE COURAGE TO FORGET . . . . .	112
VI. THE MINISTRY OF NIGHT . . . . .	128
VII. GOD WAITING MAN'S ANSWER . . . . .	146
VIII. THE LAST STEP . . . . .	164
IX. TO THE UTTERMOST . . . . .	180
X. SONS OF THE TABERNACLE . . . . .	197

	PAGE
XI. THE SEASONS OF THE SOUL . . . . .	215
XII. SELF-RESERVATION . . . . .	232
XIII. SAVING FAITH . . . . .	251
XIV. CHRIST AMONG THE COMMON THINGS OF LIFE .	266



# I

## THE EVANGELISTIC NOTE

### I

**I** WISH to record some confessions and convictions which have led to the publication of this book, and the movement which it represents. In order to do so I must, first of all, enter into some details of my own experience during the last three years.

In the August of 1902 I concluded ten years of ministry in the Highbury Quadrant Church. I had no reason to be discouraged with the nature or results of my work during these years, and yet my summer holiday, which is always with me a time of much self-examination, found me both discouraged and dissatisfied. I was haunted with a sense of unreality in my work. I could accuse myself of no stint of labour, nor my people of any visible decline of interest in my ministry, but somehow things had seemed to come to a dead pause. I viewed with dismay the coming years. Something was clearly lacking in myself and in my Church, and that deficient or lost element was precisely the element which gave vivacity to one's mind and

vitality to one's work. Did this perplexing and painful sense of unreality mean that I had reached the period when my message to my congregation was exhausted? Had the time come when, for my own sake and theirs, the separation of the pastor and the people had become a necessity? Or did my dissatisfaction imply that any call I once had to the ministry was now withdrawn, and that any work which I could do for my fellows could henceforth be better accomplished by the pen than by the tongue? These were some of the questions which agitated me during those weeks of quiet among the hills, when I had the leisure and the calm to look within my own heart, and measure with sober accuracy the tendencies of my own mind.

To one, at least, of these questions I could give a prompt reply. No change of sphere could be of real service to me, for to any sphere I should carry the same self; and, moreover, it was extremely unlikely that I should ever find any Church offering such various and wide opportunities of service as my present Church. What would it avail to change my pulpit if I could not change myself? I might possibly attain some brief impulse begotten of novelty, some new vivacity of interest from fresh conditions, but this would not serve me long. The plain fact which met me was that if I could not do the work of a Christian minister in my

present Church I could do it in no Church. During ten years of strenuous toil the Highbury Quadrant Church had been built up into a wonderful series of organisations, which answered every need of the surrounding population. I had, beside the ordinary apparatus of the Church work, a great lecture society, young men's societies, gymnastic clubs, and two large missions among the poor, the annual cost of which exceeded £1,000. Here was a mass of perfect machinery, capable of doing a great work, and the more I reflected the more certain it seemed that I could not replace this machinery by any other better adapted for the tasks of a progressive Church. Such fault as there was lay not in lack of machinery, but in deficiency of driving force.

To another of these questions I could return a reply almost as positive. Some men are called to preach and some to write. I had felt and obeyed both of these calls for twenty years, but I could not doubt which was the major call. The call to preach came earliest, and I could not believe it cancelled. I might find much joy in the ministry of the pen, but time had taught me that I must look for my highest efficiency in the ministry of public speech. I might be a reluctant prophet, but nevertheless woe was unto me if I preached not the Gospel. Whatever happened I knew in my own heart that I

dared not relinquish the work of the Christian ministry.

A plain deduction remained. I must remain where I was, and I must discover some way of bringing myself and my people into correspondence with my ideals. If any one placed as I was, and any Church with so many elements of strength, loyalty, and popularity as my own, could not do the work of Christ among the people, it was hopeless to expect success in any other direction. But where did the fault lie? What was the cause of hindrance? What missing element robbed all this great expenditure of force of its legitimate efficiency? And that was just the question which I could not answer.

The answer came suddenly, and from a totally unexpected quarter.

In the March of 1903 I was invited to read a paper at the National Free Church Council held at Brighton. I had previously spoken at great mass meetings of the Council, but I had never attended its sessions. For the first time I did so at Brighton. What were my impressions? The chief was the new atmosphere of spiritual warmth in which I found myself. I had grown cold through isolation; in fellowship I found the thrill of new, warm life. The sessions were remarkable for an ever-deepening tone of spiritual life and power. Dr. Horton preached a sermon which profoundly moved me. The

voice of confidence and conquest was in the air. The climax came in the middle of the week, when a midnight meeting was arranged. On that memorable night the members of the Council, a thousand strong, marched through the streets of Brighton gathering in the waifs and wastrels of the streets, collecting the drunkards, picking up the sons and daughters of vice, and finally returned to the Dome at Brighton an hour before midnight with such a congregation as I had never seen. Gipsy Smith gave the address. It was simple, masculine, moving, and entirely free from sensationalism. He pleaded with the lost and weary then and there to give themselves to Christ. At the close of the address I saw what I had not seen since I was a boy in Cornwall, scores of men and women rising for prayer, and pouring into an extemporised inquiry-room to seek instant deliverance from their sins. And then I knew what was the missing element in my own ministry, what was the vital deficiency in my own Church. It was evangelistic fervour, the spirit of the Christian propaganda.

I returned to my Church and my work conscious of a subtle change in myself, which affected every fibre of my thought. I could not then, I cannot now, explain that change. Nothing was altered, and yet everything was transformed. Something new was at work in me,

something that spoke in the very tones of my voice, a power that subdued me and breathed through me. One supreme thought possessed me—only by the power of a living evangelism could my ministry and my Church be henceforth justified. To introduce that power into such a Church as mine might make or break it. I had no desire to discard institutions which had grown up with the life of the Church. Could I then retain all I had, but add the programme of passionate evangelistic effort? How far would my people respond to the new note? I did not know, but I felt I must take the risk. And as it turned out there was no risk. When the proposition was made that Gipsy Smith should hold a mission at the Quadrant there was a response which surprised me. There was a deeper current of spiritual passion running under the polished surface of normal Church life than I had ever imagined. That all my people were in active sympathy I cannot affirm; human nature being what it is, that was not to be expected. The idea was new, and had to be assimilated. But the mere suggestion of a mission evoked such wonderful results, such a manifestation of zeal among the people, such a quickening of spiritual interest, that I could not doubt that I was moving on the path of God's will. For weeks before the mission was held the mission had really begun; and so much was



this the case that had no mission been held the Church would nevertheless have been transformed in spirit and ideal.

The story of the mission itself I related in the press at the time, and need not repeat here; but on its most remarkable feature some comment is required. That feature was the sudden revelation of the awful tragedy of life in the immediate neighbourhood of the church, of which no one had been conscious. Pagan London indeed lay at the very church door—the London of godless wealth, abominable vice, helpless poverty, drunkenness, crime, lust, and misery. Into my church, with all its associations of cultured worship, there swept on a given night a mass of men and women far more hopeless and depraved than those that made the midnight audience in the Dome at Brighton. We also went out to seek the lost, and the lost were there because we fetched them. My people, my deacons and workers, a thousand strong, marched at midnight, and gathered from the gutters and the public-houses a vast congregation of those for whose souls no man had cared. And just as I had discovered a spiritual readiness among my own people which I had never suspected, so now I found a response to the call of Christ among the lowest of the people which both thrilled and amazed me. Not one of the workers who entered the public-houses that

night received a single word of insult. The keepers of the lowest lodging-houses persuaded their unhappy inmates to come with us. The whole neighbourhood was moved. Astonishment reigned supreme. And I am still astonished as I reflect upon it all. I am astonished to know how easy it is to get the people if you really want them. I am yet more astonished at the miraculous way in which a single spark of enthusiasm for souls, once kindled, is able to pass like a flame through a great Church, and set it moving in a crusade of love, pity, and human service.

When the mission itself closed the greatest problem of all remained: could I, and could my Church, continue in this line of development? There was only one reply possible: we had walked in Christ's way, and we dared not depart from it. As the mission really began before Gipsy Smith did his great work among us, so it has continued for the twelve months since his departure. Every Thursday night I have held an evangelistic service, and some of the results at these services have been more astonishing than anything which happened in the week of the mission. The chief of these is the work done among fallen women. These unhappy creatures came to the Thursday services in twos and threes week after week, and, according to our power and opportunity, we have



dealt with their cases. Some we have failed to rescue, but I can count several who have found their way back to purity, one of whom is to-day a teacher in a Sunday-school. Drunkards have come to sign the pledge, despairing men to confess their sins. The work of evangelism has never ceased, nor is there the least sign of diminished interest. Nor has the work been confined merely to a class. The thoughtful and the cultured have also felt the power of the new impulse. The very atmosphere of the Church is so changed that those who knew it half a dozen years ago would scarcely recognise it to-day. Yet the leaders of the congregation are substantially the same—the same but changed. We have entered into a heritage of joy by entering into a heritage of labour. We have got to the heart of sacred realities. We believe in the power of Christ because we see that power at work. The misery of impotence, which is the torture of so many ministries and the corrosion of so many Churches, has gone for ever, and instead we know the Gospel to be the present power of God unto salvation, and are not ashamed of it.

## II

So far I have related an experience; I come now to convictions.

The questions perpetually debated in my

mind through those months of joyous effort were two, the first of which was how far the normal Church could be transformed into an evangelistic centre; and the second, how far evangelistic methods might be included in a regular pastorate. It is commonly asserted that the mass of the people will not come into churches. Missions are usually held in halls for that reason. It is further assumed that there is some irreconcilable difference between the minister and the evangelist, and a corresponding disparity between the ordinary service of a worshipping Church and the service called evangelistic. I believe these assumptions to be radically false, and therefore perilous.

The first may be disposed of at once. The example of my own Church is sufficient to teach that there is no insuperable difficulty in transforming the normal Church into an evangelistic centre. The difficulties in the way are class feeling, parochialism of idea, and the fastidiousness of a false culture. These are serious difficulties, and more serious in some Churches than in others, according to the tradition of the Church. Many Churches might quite justly be described as examples of cultivated parochialism. They are social clubs, united by moral ideals, rather than spiritual communities quick with Divine fire. Other Churches are frankly class Churches. The poor are not wanted, and

are warned off. But so far as my own experience goes this class of Church is rare, although in most prosperous churches of a suburban character individuals will be found who represent these prejudices. It is useless to inveigh against such wicked and obstinate perversions of sentiment. The fact to be reckoned with is that the men who, in their expressed opinions and exclusive temper, seem utterly hostile to the spirit of Jesus, are nevertheless often men of much substantial goodness. They will give time and money to objects which commend themselves to their judgment. Moreover, they are in the Church, and cannot be turned out without violent disruption and some scandal.

There is a better way; let such men see for themselves the actual work of a mission, and their prejudices will be dissolved. These prejudices are the fruit of isolation. They are cured by contact with actual facts. In all but very rare cases a man of really sympathetic heart has only to be brought face to face with human need to realise that it involves obligations. Indeed, the real source of deadness and decay in many Churches is precisely the absence of the poor. We need a mingling of all classes in a Church for its own sake, for a true Church should be a microcosm of the world itself, in which many kinds of men constitute the social whole. It needs no argument to prove that the

organisation of wealth and culture for the service of poverty and ignorance is the first of Christian ethics, and the wealthy and cultured have more to gain from it in the heightening and deepening of their own sympathies than the poor and ignorant in the application of those sympathies. We have within our Churches at the present time, imperfect as they are, a force sufficient for the Christian conquest of the world. All that is needed is to mobilise our forces. I found so little real difficulty in mobilising the forces at my disposal for evangelistic work that I suspect these difficulties are greatly exaggerated by timid men who put upon the traditions of a Church the blame which really belongs to themselves. Given bold and wise leadership, I believe that there is no Church that will not hail the bugle-note that calls the advance.

As regards the question of evangelistic efforts in a regular pastorate, the difficulty is also more imaginary than real. What is needed? Merely a change of method—a simpler style of address, a more direct appeal, a more unrestrained fervour. Most ministers have commenced their ministries with evangelism. That which first led them to preach was a real passion for souls. Let the old man look back far enough, and he will see a youth full of warm enthusiasm pleading with men and women for

their redemption—a youth who was once himself. What has changed him? Very often nothing more than the deadening effect of a continuous pastorate. He has come to regard himself rather as the calm expositor of truth than its impassioned advocate. The note of appeal has disappeared, or has been wilfully suppressed. And although he may not know it, that is the real cause of the weariness he feels in his task as the years advance. He grieves over the lack of result, over the deficiency of positive and plain result, without perceiving that he himself has made such results impossible. But that which a man has once possessed can always be recovered. He who has been an evangelist once can be an evangelist again, and a much more competent and wise evangelist, in the ratio of his wider experience, if he will allow himself freedom. For of all the errors that have wrought ruin to the Church none has been more fatal than the tacit admission that the work of the minister is a thing separate from the work of the evangelist. It has meant that the minister has become a vocal essayist, and evangelism has come to be regarded with contempt. It has also meant that the work of evangelism, being thus regarded as inferior, has been left to inferior men—or let us say to men whose admirable zeal has not been always united with the highest qualities of intellect.

This sentence is not meant to imply on my part the least dispraise of the existing evangelist. I owe too much to such a man as Gipsy Smith ever to allow myself to speak in any terms but those of gratitude of men who, like himself, spend their lives in the arduous work of conducting special missions. But the question in my mind is this, Is the gift of the evangelist so unique that it cannot be expected in the average minister? I cannot admit that it is. The power of the evangelist usually lies not so much in superiority of gift as in superior earnestness, manifesting itself in great directness of appeal and a positive belief in immediate results. And, if that be the case, it is clear that it is a gift within the reach of most of us. If we have it not, it is because we have not sought to possess it. We have not made it our business to save souls. We have not studied the art of persuasion. We have been content with some other function, more agreeable to our taste, which we have vainly imagined more important. Hence we have come to regard the evangelist as an expert in a branch of spiritual science which really belongs to the mere alphabet of our own calling as ministers. Expert in winning souls the evangelist may be, and let us thankfully acknowledge his gift; but the minister in his regular pastorate should be an expert too; and if he be not, nor seeks to be, it may be



gravely doubted whether he is not false to his high vocation as the ambassador of Christ.

And so, following the course of this debate in my own mind, the conclusion seemed plain that I could not exonerate myself if I refused the work of the evangelist. I might perform it imperfectly, but I was bound to attempt it. I had much to learn, and a new method to acquire, but the only way to learn how to preach is by preaching. And from this conviction which concerned myself I passed to another of more general application. All things being equal, the man best fitted for evangelism was the man who brought to the work the ripest mind and widest culture. There is no valid reason why culture and evangelism should be treated as opposites. They were united in Wesley, they were united in Henry Drummond. The greater the intellectual equipment, always provided it is united with faith and fervour, the greater will be the success of the evangelist. In an age of education there is surely room for an evangelism that can speak equally to the cultured and the illiterate; an evangelism which knows how to assimilate the best results of knowledge without losing the simplicity of faith; an evangelism which understands that the real emphasis of Christian truth lies where it has always lain, not in the contentions of Biblical criticism, but in those eternal verities of faith

and experience which no criticism can destroy, or even impugn.

At this point it is probable that I may give offence to some good men who appear to imagine that it is impossible for any effective spiritual zeal to be found in combination with a liberal theology. I admit that a liberal theology has often been associated rather with social than spiritual zeal. In the effort to attain theological sanity religious teachers have often passed into the cold realm of a barren intellectualism. The inference is perhaps natural that liberal theology implies decay of spiritual passion; but there is nothing in the nature of things to make this disaster inevitable. The whole question is very largely one of emphasis. For my own part I cannot admit that it is necessary to close one's eyes to all the splendid and reverent work of our greatest Biblical critics in order to retain a vision of the Cross of Christ. There may have been two Isaiahs, or twenty; what has that to do with me so long as I have the profound spiritual message contained in the book which bears the name of Isaiah? I am wisely indifferent whether Bacon or Shakespeare wrote "Hamlet," so long as I have "Hamlet"; and who would insist that a certain critical view of the authorship of "Hamlet" is imperative before one should be allowed to expound the teachings



of the drama? The critic does his work, well or ill, as the case may be; I may accept or reject his views, but the message of the book is still mine. In the same way I take the ground that it is a mistake in emphasis for an evangelist to make some particular view of verbal inspiration or the Book of Jonah a *sine qua non* of his message. Such questions do not belong to him, and are usually outside his competence. He injures his influence, especially with the thoughtful men, by obtruding them. The plain fact, as it appears to me, is that these matters have no relation to the Gospel of Evangelism. The evangelist's concern is with the great spiritual facts of sin, penitence, and redemption; his battlefield is the human will; his message is the love and judgment of God; his work is the practical work of winning men for Christ. Let him keep to his own ground, and he is strong. He has too much to preach that is beyond all debate to trouble himself, or perplex his hearers, by meddling with questions on which he cannot pretend to speak with intellectual authority.

The time has clearly come for liberal theology to justify itself in the eyes of the people, if it can, for the people are weary of negations. Can liberal theology justify itself? It can do so in one way only, by showing its capacity for spiritual zeal. For liberal theology has also

been guilty of wrong emphasis. It has emphasised its doubts rather than its faiths. It has been destructive of error, but not constructive of truth. It has told people what to reject, but not what to believe. It is not surprising that it is distrusted by people who, above all things, crave a positive faith; yet it has a faith, a real and deep faith, founded on a real spiritual experience, if it would but have the courage to declare it. When to its deep knowledge liberal theology adds the burning faith begotten of vital spiritual experience, it will become the greatest power for evangelism that the world has ever known.

So, then, the conviction has grown in me that though much has been shaken in the realm of thought, nothing is shaken in the world of experience; the kingdom of spiritual fact abides. I hold to the old evangelical message, although for me the shibboleth of utterance may differ. I find myself at home in a Salvation Army meeting, because I find there the vital knowledge of God's dealings with the soul and the expression of a religious experience which is as old as the Cross. My mind concentrates itself more and more on positive truth, and my effort as a minister of Christ on the efficiency of the accomplished purpose. I am much more concerned to save one harlot from her shame, one drunkard from his folly, one prodigal son from the

defilement of the far country, than to discuss those speculations about truth which, after all, interest but a few and are not helpful even to them. Life is growing short; let it be my business, though I am the slave of no man, to make myself the slave of all men, if by any means I can save some. For this I know, that the power of Christ does still save men, and this is as much knowledge as I need for the work of the evangel. This is the one essential creed, and nothing else greatly matters.

This is the essential creed, but in its full expression there is room for every faculty of the mind. Nothing is more needed in the evangelistic sermon than sound fundamental brain-work. Such a sermon should have superior and outstanding qualities of its own, such as pungency, directness, cogency of appeal, force of persuasion, but it will never influence the thoughtful unless it has sound fundamental brain-work. The evangelist will gain immensely in power by being also a thinker. This is one of the lessons of Wesley's life which has been strangely overlooked. It is a lesson that we have to re-learn. Wesley was a clear and very logical thinker and, from the merely intellectual point of view, a great preacher, yet he was the greatest of evangelists. Can we refuse the deduction that evangelism has everything to gain and nothing to

lose by the closest possible alliance with culture? And, in the conditions of our own time, with its constantly rising standard of education, is not the union of culture with evangelism absolutely necessary if evangelism is once more to become a national force?

### III

Upon this branch of the theme I may add some observations of a practical nature.

I have already said that it is commonly assumed that the masses of the people have a rooted aversion to churches, and therefore for the purposes of a great mission some secular ground should be chosen, such as a public hall, a theatre, or a building especially erected for the mission. I do not for a moment question the fact that it is much easier to get the masses of the people to come together in a hall than a church. There is a sense of freedom in a hall, an equality, an absence of restraint not found in a church. People can sit where they please, whereas in a church, whose hundreds of pews are labelled with the names of individual proprietors, there is a sense of intrusion. There is also a sense of novelty about religious services in a secular building. Were I conducting a mission in a great city I should for many reasons prefer a public hall, and I have no doubt the experience of most

evangelists would point toward the same choice.

But I am now pleading for normal evangelism, the transformation of the existing church into an evangelistic centre, and this, of course, implies the use of the church itself for the work. Is it really true that the mass of the people have an aversion to the church so strong and obstinate that you must provide some other building for them if you wish to attract them? I do not believe it. My own experience disproves the assumption. During the last twelve months representatives of almost every grade of society, from the man of culture to the street vagrant, have entered my church. The real reason why "the man in the street" hesitates to enter a church is that he thinks he will not be welcome in it. Show him that he is welcome, and his hesitation vanishes. What he most dreads is intrusion. He is morbidly sensitive to the least slight. Nothing offends him so deeply as the conduct of some selfish pewholder, who shows resentment or contemptuous tolerance of his presence. The great thing, therefore, is to make him feel that the church is his; that it exists for him; that it was built for his use; that he is thoroughly welcome in it. In a Catholic cathedral the rich and poor meet as sharers of an equal right. No one need offer an apology for using a building that is his by

right. Our great Protestant sanctuaries should occupy the same position in public thought. When they are thus administered as buildings erected by the people, and for the people, there is no difficulty in attracting the people to them.

What is the great end of a mission? It is not only to redeem men for Christ, but it is to bring them into active union with the organised Church of Christ. It is something, therefore, first of all, to familiarise them with church buildings. A mission in a public hall has great immediate advantages, but if missions are to be held only in public halls is not the impression created that there is some element about the ordinary church building which is antagonistic to mission enterprise? Does not the very success of the hall injure the Church? It seems to me that one of the most serious faults in modern evangelism is that it often creates an impression of antagonism to the normal Church. The evangelist frequently permits himself to attack the Church, its services, its institutions, its ministers. He forgets that any real results of his work must be harvested by the normal Church. His business is at least to work with the ordinary ministers in heartiest sympathy, and even when he finds little answering sympathy to be magnanimous enough to refrain from attack. And since, in the long run, the steady drudging work of religious regeneration



must be done by the Churches themselves, it is manifest that the closer the association between the Church and the Mission the better. All things being equal, except in the case of great united missions in great cities, the mission held in a church is likely to have more durable results than the mission held in a hall. It has the great initial advantage of familiarising the people with the church. Nothing so breaks down prejudice against a church which has been regarded as exclusive or aristocratic as a mission which gathers within its walls all classes of the community and leaves with them memories of good which go far to sanctify in their regard the building itself.

Besides this, there is a very practical aspect of this matter. Here we have throughout the land thousands of magnificent buildings, spacious, costly, and equipped for a certain work, and what possible justification can there be for deserting these buildings when we make a special effort to reach the people—except that of inadequate accommodation? These buildings represent millions of money and great generosity and self-sacrifice; are they after all only so many costly mistakes? They were built for the glory of God in the salvation of men; let them therefore be used for this supreme end. They are costly mistakes, indeed, if they are too fine or too elaborate or too sacro-sanct in the

eyes of their custodians for the purpose of an evangelistic service.

Certain good friends of mine have occasionally said to me during the last year, "But why can't you be content to gather these poor people into your mission-halls, instead of bringing them into the Quadrant Church? We have two mission-halls in poor neighbourhoods, especially built and maintained for these people; surely they would be more at home there?" Here is another mistake, or rather a whole series of mistakes. For the poor people do not prefer the small mission-hall. They also are sensitive, and are especially sensitive to the idea of condescension implied in a little special hall set aside for their use. Strange as it may seem, yet they are very like other folk in preferring a great church with a crowd of people, and all the stimulus of the crowd, to a little hall with a handful of people. They like the better music, the organ, the full choir, the good soloist, the stir and animation of the big assembly. And they like the best kind of preaching, as long as it is simple enough to be apprehended by them. You cannot preach too well for poor folk. If the mass is to be won, it will only be by giving them the very best we have. I am so sure of this, that I believe the day of the little mission-hall is over. We do but waste our money and our effort by maintaining a series of small halls



in the crowded localities of our great cities. The wiser and much the more economical policy is to use our great churches as the great centres of all our missionary effort. Instead of dispersing power over a ring of struggling mission-halls, concentrate power on the mother Church itself. And in doing this the Church itself gets a new quickening. It becomes more vital by the element of variety in its composition and in its services.

“ Well,” people say, “ but the big church means a big expense ; it means a constant appeal for money, and the outsider, attracted into a church by a mission, does not want to be importuned for money. He usually wants everything for nothing.” This is not only an error, it is a libel. It was disproved during my own special mission. There was a collection at every service, and in ten days the people gave £340. It was especially disproved at one of these services, consisting of men only, convened on a Sunday afternoon. It was a great promiscuous audience gathered together by a band and a parade in the streets. My cautious friends said to me, “ You had better not ask them for a collection. They won’t like it.” I rose and said, “ You are mostly working-men, and the working-man usually likes to pay for anything he values. I shall not ask you for a collection if you don’t want one.

Will you have a collection? ” They at once responded “ Aye,” and the collection was £10. The error has been disproved since in my weekly Evangelistic Services. I have taken a collection every Thursday night, simply explaining that I looked to the people interested in evangelism to support it, and no one has raised the least objection. There may be many reasons which keep the masses out of church, but certainly the collection is not one of them.

I hold, therefore, that the existing Church has all the equipment for, and should be the scene of, the new evangelism. Once more I repeat that it is the mobilisation of the existing forces that we want. We have treated our churches, especially when composed of people of culture and social competence, too much as schools of spiritual and moral culture, too little as the training grounds of an army bent on conquest. The time has come to close the book on tactics and gird on the sword. We know all about the theory of warfare; we have now to take the field. We have talked much, and wisely; let us now act, and bravely. We are gathered into churches not to get good for ourselves only, but to do good to others. The time has come when every efficient in the regiments of Christ should answer to his Captain’s call, march out of the barrack-yard, and attempt the

work of conquest. For of all armies, it is true, as was said of Cæsar's legions, "armies exist only by always fighting, and conquest comes of conquering."

## IV

I have already touched, in a fugitive fashion, upon some of the qualities that should inhere in an evangelistic sermon, such as superior power of pungency or appeal; but the whole matter is much too important for cursory treatment. If we grant that normal evangelism is both possible and desirable, the question at once arises in the mind of the ordinary minister, as it did in mine, "What am I to do to fit myself for this type of ministry?" The main answer can be given at once: Seek a deeper spiritual life, that you may be the channel of a new spiritual power. The great temptation of all ministers, and particularly of those of unusual intellectual gifts, is to rely rather on the efficiency of intellectual gift for success than upon the direct and vitalising power of the Holy Ghost. This transference of faith from the mystic and Divine element, which lies at the back of all religious consciousness, to the positive and plain process of ideas by which religious consciousness is interpreted, is in many men unconscious. The making of a sermon, being a form of intellectual activity constantly repeated, in course of time

comes to be regarded as an intellectual process only. With many men it cannot even be said that there is any transference of faith in the power of the mystic element to the power of the intellectual, because the first has never really existed for them. They have never learnt to attach the least definite meaning to the promise of Christ that the Holy Ghost should give the disciples utterance according to their need; which implies that behind the preacher there is a power, not himself, that uses him as its channel. The entire training of a modern minister represses, if it does not contradict this conception. By the time a prolonged college course is finished, an abiding impression is often created in the mind of a young minister that to be amply furnished with intellectual weapons for his task is to be completely equipped. This impression is probably fostered and deepened by the temper of the Church to which he ministers. He is led to suppose by the comments made upon his sermons, and by the kind of praise lavished upon any sermon of unusual intellectual brilliance, that the people are entirely satisfied with the kind of discourse which does little more than display his own gifts and gratify their culture. Thus the sense of anything mystic which lies behind the function of preaching, any prophetic vision directly communicated and revealed, gradually dies away.

He speaks his own mind, and no doubt helpfully to others; but he does not speak the mind of God, as one who is moved by the Holy Ghost.

Yet nothing can be plainer than that in all great and successful evangelistic ministries there has been an element of power totally distinct from intellectual gift. It may embrace the noblest intellectual gifts—have I not already argued that the fuller the intellectual equipment, the better fitted is any man for evangelism?—but it is distinct from it. There is, for example, a most suggestive description of the preaching of Francis of Assisi which has often impressed me. Thomas of Spoleto, who heard him preach in the Piazza at Bologna in 1220, expresses his wonder at finding so many learned men filled with admiration of so plain a man. For, says Thomas, in what is evidently a painful effort to comprehend a phenomenon too difficult for him, “he had not the manners of a preacher: his ways were rather those of conversation. His apparel was poor, his person in no respect imposing. His face was not at all handsome; yet God gave such great efficacy to his words that he brought back to peace and harmony many nobles whose savage fury had not stopped short of the spilling of blood.” “God gave efficacy to his words,” here Thomas surprised the true secret of Francis,

and of all great evangelists. One does well to meditate also on that other illuminative sentence of Thomas—"he had not the manners of a preacher: his ways were rather those of conversation." Thomas evidently expected from so famous a man cultivated oratory, and he found instead a man entirely simple in speech, who went to the point at once, and knew how to get there. For entire simplicity in speech is only possible when we have ceased to think of ourselves. Self-consciousness, which is really a subtle form of pride and vanity, is the ruin of ministers. But when a minister becomes so much aware of a Divine power uttering itself through him that he yields himself wholly to it, his message naturally becomes so much more to him than the form of its utterance, that he attains by intuition that convincing note of simplicity, sincerity, and earnestness which alone is able to move and mould great masses of men.

"Oft, when the Word is on me to deliver,  
Opens the heaven, and the Lord is there.

Then with a rush the intolerable craving  
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet-call,—  
Oh to save these! to perish for their saving,  
Die for their life, be offered for them all."

But the Word must be *on* a man, a Divine burden, a pressure and a potency, an inrushing



tide from an infinite deep, that floods his own heart and life to the depths, before he can attain either the self-effacement or the spiritual passion of the true prophet.

There are many parallels to this description of the preaching of Francis. The men who made the great Evangelistic Revival of the eighteenth century were in most cases much more remarkable for their mystic spiritual power than for any extraordinary breadth of intellectual gift. They were mostly men of the type of David Brainerd, who lived so thoroughly in a world of spiritual emotions that when they preached men became aware of strange spiritual potencies in them which lay quite outside the apprehension or analysis of reason. In the severity of the discipline which they underwent for the subjugation of the flesh and its passions; in their habits of intense and prolonged prayer; in the vivid sense they habitually had of a struggle with unseen powers; in their singular capacity of extreme rapture and extreme despondence, they were close akin to saints like Francis, and dreamers like Bunyan, and poets like Cowper. Far as such men stand apart in matters of thought, yet they inhabited the same world, a world which throbbed and quickened in the "white radiance of eternity." Thus a certain power clothed them which was nameless to the purely intel-

lectual critic. Their influence upon the mind and wills of those who heard them seemed to be, and indeed was, as it appeared to Thomas of Spoleto when he heard Francis preach, quite out of proportion to their intellectual force. Any one who has heard some more than usually successful modern evangelist has often found cause for the same kind of criticism. Such a hearer has asked, sometimes in genuine wonder, sometimes with veiled scorn, What is there in the man or his utterance to account for his influence over the people? There has been no originality of thought, no brilliance of expression, and, it may be, but little of the arts of oratory. It would be easy to name dozens of men who could preach a better sermon, and it is not vanity which has led the critic to think that he could preach a much better sermon himself. Yet the fact remains that in such cases as these the weak things appear chosen to confound the mighty, as though God meant the lesson to be learned that it is not by might, but by the Spirit of Divine enduement, that miracles are wrought. The actual living of a spiritual life is the one method by which spiritual power is acquired.

It is no doubt much easier, much less irksome, for a minister to live a life of high intellectual interests tempered by spiritual desires, and it is probable that his congregation will ask nothing



more of him. But when nothing more is attempted, and nothing more demanded, the end of the day can only bring spiritual bankruptcy. Moreover, the work of a minister implies spiritual leadership. He has to create demands as well as supply them. It is no exaggeration, and neither is it egoism, to say that as the prophet is, so will be the people. A congregation soon discovers the measure of its minister, and it will be no more spiritual, no more self-sacrificing, no more zealous of good works than he is. When we complain of the deadness of our congregations, ought we not rather to examine our own hearts? And if we do so with rigid scrutiny, should we not often find that we are dead? And this may imply no conscious lapse of faith, no desistance from high moral effort, nothing that could justly be described as apostasy. It is something which consists less in a falling away than in a failure to press forward. We have planned our path along safe ways, and have not made for the heights. We have not imagined sainthood as our goal. We have been equally unwilling to practice either the discipline of the saint or to seek a share in his emotions. That we have done good and are doing good is not denied; but we do not need to be reminded that we dwell in a wholly different world from a Francis, or a Bunyan, or a Brainerd. Is it possible that we, the ordinary min-

isters of Christ, can enter the strange world where they dwelt? Can we share their passion, their power, and their gift? If we can trust either Scripture, or history, or experience, there can be no doubt of the reply; for their passion was a passion for the souls of the people which every Christian should feel; and their power was the power of perfect submission to Christ, which every Christian may practice; and their gift was the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is the catholic inheritance of the entire Christian Church.

Granting, then, that the indispensable condition of evangelistic equipment is the kind of spiritual force which springs from a deep and intense spiritual life, we may now consider what are the qualities peculiar to an evangelistic sermon. "His ways were rather those of conversation," says the critic of Francis. It is clear that Francis was unconventional. He paid no attention to the merely artificial rules of oratory. Two hundred and seventy years later we find the same phenomenon in Savonarola. Savonarola commenced his ministry in Florence with sermons of the formal type that were then popular—polished, learned, and literary—and he attracted no attention. His career as a preacher did not begin till he freed himself from the trammels of this tradition. He discarded artificiality, became natural, al-

lowed all his gifts free play, and the effect was immediate and immense. His passion for Christ and for the immediate establishment of Christ's kingdom broke through all the trammels of the pulpit. Some were scandalised, all were startled; but the fact remains that these sermons moved Florence to her depths, and even a man like Michael Angelo, artist, poet, and scholar as he was, in his extreme old age could not recall and speak of these sermons without tears.

The pulpit now, as then, has traditions which are a trammel upon free utterance. Intense and passionate utterance is liable to be misunderstood; it is often not welcomed, and it is always deprecated by those with whom decorum counts for more than truth. And yet I believe no preacher is so generally respected in the long run as the preacher who is fearless. I am led to think that in every church, however cultured and accustomed to restraint its congregation may be, there are multitudes of people who would hail with joy the brave voice that spoke in complete disregard of convention. I believe that we ministers are in most instances much too mealy-mouthed in our applications of truth. We do not come to grips with the conscience; we move, high-poised, on a wide circle round our prey, and never drop with the hawk's swiftness and deadly impact upon it; and the

result is a sense of unreality in our performances, as though the whole affair were a stage illusion of cardboard armies in a mock conflict. I was much struck by the remark of one of the most able and cultured men in Plymouth Church at the conclusion of my mission. "I have only one complaint to make against you," he said, "you did not hit us hard enough." And as I have reflected upon that remark I have come to think that the chief cause for the decline of influence in the modern pulpit is the lack of entire plain speaking. We are the slaves of convention. We imagine that because a congregation is wealthy and cultured it knows nothing about sin. For my part I confess that since I have been at pains to understand the constituent elements of my own congregation a very different conclusion has been forced upon me. I know now that I can address no congregation in a great city that is not likely to include the drunkard, the adulterer, the youth of impure life, the woman beset by temptation, the commercial rogue, and the man who draws his revenues from wrong. Face to face with these awful realities of life the speech of the preacher must also be a real thing, or it will be useless.

In the Yale Lectures on preaching of Nathaniel Burton, who was one of the most spiritual and accomplished ministers New England

ever had, there is this significant confession: "It has been the sin of my life," says Burton, "that I have not always taken aim. I have been a lover of subjects. If I had loved men more, and loved subjects only as God's instruments of good for men, it would have been better, and I should have more to show for all my labour under the sun." How many of us might make the same confession? We have loved subjects; loved, that is, a theme for its own sake. We have taken pleasure, as we have given pleasure, in its suggestiveness, its stately evolution, its march of polished phrase, its "linked sweetness long drawn out." But we have not taken aim, and that is a fatal deficiency. The arrow has described a brilliant parabola in the air, but it has not cleaved the mark; and to fail of the mark is to fail altogether. Herein, then, is the distinguishing characteristic of the evangelistic sermon—it takes aim. The evangelist pleads for a verdict. His immediate duty—and it should be one that impassions all his powers—is to win men then and there for Christ. And what applies to the evangelist should be applicable to all preaching; it should have a perfectly definite purpose and goal. Otherwise it is lecturing, not preaching; and it is the use of the pulpit for lecturing instead of preaching that has done more than anything else to reduce its influence, and to produce

both in the speaker and the hearer a sense of unreality.

In the preaching that thus takes aim there will necessarily be found the element of directness. Here again a passage from Burton's Lectures is significant. He tells us that he once delivered an address on temperance to an assembly of sailors. They listened to his carefully written speech in entire silence and with perfect respect. When he had finished, a thick-set sailor man talked to them for ten minutes, "and then they were impressed beyond bounds, and beyond all the proprieties of silence. I felt my superiority even yet, in respect of brains, and culture, and the power to write a good-looking manuscript, so that I did not propose to exchange with him and be he; but I would like to know for all time the straight cut to men's minds, hearts, and wills." It is precisely the knowledge of the straight cut which is indispensable to the evangelistic preacher. It is found more easily by the illiterate than the cultured. There is a great deal of intellectual baggage to be discarded before the soldier of the schools can transform himself into the guerilla chief. Yet if the soldier of the schools, the man versed and learned in all the fine strategies of war, can but discover how to move freely, he will make a thousand-fold better guerilla chief than the man who has not had his training.



Above all, there must be heard in evangelistic preaching the note of authority. It is the positive conviction based upon the positive experience that tells. The message to be spoken is one of life or death, and it is not our own. We speak for Another, to whom is given the jurisdiction of both time and eternity. We are the Ambassadors of a Kingdom that cannot be removed. Whether people hear or forbear, the message must be spoken. And man being what he is, a creature constantly misled by his passions, and misdirected by false guides; a wanderer who has lost the path and is weary of illusions; and above all a creature conscious of his own incompetence, he will eagerly respond to the note of authority. His supreme need is obedience, and he knows it. His own painful errors dispose him to submission to any authority competent to direct and guide him. So it has happened, and so it will always happen, that when one speaks to him with authority, and not as the scribes, he hears him gladly. The power of the evangelist will be in the direct ratio of the sense of authority created by his character, his life, and his message.

## v

I come now to that sequence of providences which led to my visit to the United States, and the work I was led to do there. On the 21st



November, 1903, I attended the first meeting of the special mission in my own church at Highbury. On the 21st November, 1904, I had a great farewell meeting in Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, at the close of a week's mission services. The 21st of November is my birthday.

Had any one two years ago prophesied either of those events to me, I should have received the prophecy with entire incredulity. Had any one during the period of troubled debate which I suffered in the summer of 1902 even so much as hinted at such possibilities in my life, I should have been moved to ridicule. Constitutionally, or at least by long habit of mind, I had less sympathy with revivalism than most ministers. The barbaric theology, the crude appeal, the sensational pyrotechnics, the doubtful methods of the old-fashioned revivalism, had always moved my repulsion. My occasional contact with revival preachers in early life had not been fortunate. On one occasion I had been forced wholly to withdraw myself from a preacher of this kind who was holding a mission in a church under my care. My gospel was, I was proud to think, the gospel of sweetness and light. The only evangelist who had ever commanded my sympathy was Moody, and my contact with him was brief and fugitive. Henry Drummond I knew rather as a man of letters and a charming personality than an evangelist. From time to

time other evangelists had crossed my path, but I had derived no help from them. Yet there was that in me which did respond to the Evangelistic Note. I could have followed Catherine Booth. I had often listened to the Salvationist at the street corner with a thrilling heart. But I simply state the plain truth about myself when I say that in 1902 the last possible thought that could have occurred to me would have been that ever I should visit the United States to conduct an evangelistic campaign.

It was in the summer of 1902 that Dr. Hillis visited my Church in London. I had but three days of his company, and I did not meet him again till we met in New York. He pressed me to visit America on the ground that my books were widely read there. He promised me a very friendly reception, and the prospect naturally attracted me. But neither he nor I imagined any other programme than a tour that should occupy itself mainly with public lectures and occasional sermons. I first of all proposed to come in the summer of 1903, but found it impossible to leave my Church. I again proposed to come in the summer of 1904, but this arrangement was also cancelled. At last the autumn of 1904 was fixed for the visit. It appeared that the National Council of Congregationalism was to be held at Des Moines in the October of this year, and Dr. Hillis thought it highly desir-

able that I should attend it. He drew up for me a programme which included many addresses at colleges and universities, and a reasonable amount of preaching. On the 28th of September of the present year I left England to fulfil this programme.

According to my programme I was to preach at Plymouth Church on the second Sunday evening in October. On the previous day I had a conversation with Dr. Hillis, in his study, in which I was moved to tell him all about the recent changes in my own life and ministry. I described the Brighton meetings, the mission in my own Church, the many moving incidents in that mission, and the new spiritual life that had come from it both to my congregation and myself. I was moved to tears, and so was he. At last he cried, "We must have a mission in Plymouth Church, and you must conduct it." The proposition seemed fanciful. I could not imagine it possible that any Church, and especially Plymouth Church, would at a moment's notice accept the idea of a mission. It was something foreign to the traditions of the Church, and I was totally unknown to the people. "You will see," said Dr. Hillis. And we saw on Sunday night. At the close of the sermon Dr. Hillis rose and explained his wishes. He asked all those who desired me to conduct a mission in Plymouth Church, and would sup-

port me in it, to rise. The whole vast congregation rose. Such a call was too positive and too overwhelming to be refused. With much secret misgiving, and yet with a strong conviction that God's hand was in it all, I consented to conduct the mission.

On the following Sunday Dr. Hillis and I met again in Des Moines. I did not know until I arrived what part was allotted to me in the programme of the Council. It seemed that I was to speak for not more than twenty minutes on the Sunday afternoon. "About what?" I asked. "Tell them about your mission," said Dr. Hillis. I did so, and I found that the simple story moved the audience in just the same way that it had already moved Dr. Hillis. I should have left Des Moines on the Monday to fulfil certain lecture engagements, but here once more Providence interposed. I received a telegram to the effect that the lecture engagements were cancelled. I never heard the reason, and I do not know it now; but nothing that has ever happened to me has impressed me so deeply with the overruling will of God. For as a result of the brief Sunday speech a special meeting on evangelism was arranged in Des Moines on the following Tuesday afternoon. I came to it without the least idea of what was expected of me. I found myself once more telling my story, and more and more as I spoke I felt the power

of God present in that meeting as I had never known it in my life. I can only judge by the articles in the papers, and the general testimony, of its effect on others. "Father" Clark, the beloved founder of the Christian Endeavour Movement, used as he must be to great spiritual meetings, described that meeting as the most remarkable that he had ever known. I think we were all melted; we all felt the hovering tongues of flame. Dr. Amory Bradford made an impassioned plea for a deepened spiritual experience in ministers as the precedent condition of a new revival. There was no need to argue the case of evangelism; it was admitted. It seemed to me as if I had simply applied the spark of flame to a train already laid. An hour later I was permitted to address the whole Council on the same theme. There could be no doubt of the solemn and deep enthusiasm which pervaded that assembly. And in that moment, as I bowed in tears, while "Father" Clark led the closing prayer, I knew why I had come to the United States. I saw, as by a flash of light, the long sequences of Providence. I knew why I had not come in the summer of 1903; I was not ripe for the work God had for me to do. My thoughts went back to that midnight meeting in Brighton, and I saw a little flame of holy fire kindled in my heart, and that flame communicated to my own Church;

and, lastly, the same flame graciously permitted to pass through me to this great assembly of ministers who represented a continent. I was awed, thrilled, humbled. Words can only misinterpret the emotion I then felt and feel now. Heaven can have no more sacred hours for me than those hours at Des Moines. Surely there, upon me and many others, there came the baptism of Evangelism.

In the meantime a cable message from my own Church had been received, extending my time of absence, so that I might commence my mission at Plymouth Church on Sunday, November 13th. It is not necessary for me to detail my movements on leaving Des Moines. I had opportunities in Chicago, Boston, Hartford, and many other places, of conversing with ministers and addressing various gatherings of the Churches on what had now become for me the message of my visit. I was received with more than kindness by all my brethren. Does Dr. Gunsaulus remember how our hearts burned together as we sat in the empty Auditorium at Chicago and discussed the possibilities of a great Evangelistic Mission in Chicago? Shall I ever forget similar conversations with many other brethren, representing many cities from Boston to the Pacific slope? And what struck me most, over and above the personal affection revealed in those conversa-



tions, was the quick sensitiveness to ideas among all with whom I spoke, the practical sagacity, the spiritual enthusiasm, the broad and bold conception of what an evangelistic campaign in the States would mean. There was no hanging back, no word of doubt. The conviction seemed general that a great movement had begun. Speaking with soberest caution, and with the desire to repress the least tendency to exaggeration, I make bold to say that I found every sign of a great coming revival in the temper of every minister with whom I talked on spiritual things. There was a sound of a going in the tops of the trees, the audible stirring of the wind of God bringing with it fertility and freshness, and the promise of new life. Of this I am sure: unless every sign be false, there is a great wave of evangelical revival about to pass over the Churches of America.

On Sunday, November 13th, I commenced my mission at Plymouth Church. A gale was blowing, and throughout the day the rain fell in torrents. I waited anxiously for Monday, which I knew would be the crucial day for the mission. Monday evening found the church with a large but not a full congregation. But from that point the momentum of the mission increased with each service. Requests for prayer began to flow in. The reading of these requests produced a profound impression. They revealed



moral and spiritual tragedies that came as a revelation. A wife described the agonised struggles of her husband to keep from strong drink. A mother asked prayer for her only son, a boy of one-and-twenty, in jail for fraud. A Yorkshire lad, workless and foodless, described how the thought of his mother had brought him to the service. There were other letters containing confessions of misconduct, or asking guidance in matters of truth and faith. Here was the justification of the mission, the cry of tortured humanity for redemption. Yet my congregation was, as Dr. Hillis has borne witness, of unusual quality both intellectually and socially. It was composed in much the larger part of men. On the Monday night I began to realise the difficulty of my task, and was discouraged. On the Tuesday night a genuine movement began. At the close of my address many rose in token of surrender to Christ, or to express a desire for prayer, and this was increasingly a feature of each successive service. After each service Dr. Hillis and myself met those who desired spiritual guidance or help. On the Friday evening the church was quite filled; at each service on Sunday, November 20th, hundreds were turned away. Beyond stating these bare facts it is not for me to describe further the doings of this memorable week.

Had there been more time for preparation, there is no doubt that much more definite results might have been secured. We had but a bare month for preparation. I had only one opportunity of meeting the members of Plymouth Church previous to the mission to explain my plans. In the case of the mission at my own Church we had months of preparation. We had five large committees constantly at work. We had a perfectly organised staff of workers drilled in their respective duties. I lay stress upon this point, because one of my critics has pointed out some deficiencies in the Plymouth services, such as the absence of a choir, and has rightly said that without thorough and adequate preparation the full results of a mission cannot be realised. But this very deficiency only makes the Plymouth mission more remarkable. It was an improvised, almost an impromptu, mission, yet it laid hold of the city in a degree quite unimagined and unprecedented. The very absence of much that always attracts the masses in an evangelistic mission served to emphasise the fact that it was the power of truth alone which drew the people to Plymouth Church. The services were absolutely plain: there was no attempt at sensationalism in anything that was done or said; yet the people thronged to the church until it was crowded beyond its utmost capacity.

One feature of the mission was unique—it was a mission by the pen as well as by the voice. For a whole week Dr. Hillis edited an entire page of *The Brooklyn Eagle*. He discussed himself, and gathered round him a band of brilliant men for the discussion of, the great moral and spiritual problems of the nation. Thus, in addition to the verbatim report of my addresses, each day there was presented to the public a striking manifesto on the greatest questions of the time. It is impossible to gauge the effect of these discussions, but there can be no doubt that they interpreted the purposes and spirit of the mission to great numbers of thoughtful men who had no predilection for Churches, and still less for ordinary evangelistic services. If, as Dr. Hillis states, “the very best people” attended these services, including “jurists, lawyers, editors, bankers, merchants, manufacturers, educators—men who do things and control the life of this great city,” he did far more than I to attract them. His part in the mission was one which none but himself could have attempted; it was to reconcile thoughtful men to the idea of evangelism, to rehabilitate and reinstate it, to ally it with broad civic and national aims, and to assert its claim upon the intellect. This crusade through the press conducted by Dr. Hillis is something which, so far as I am aware, has never yet

been attempted in union with evangelistic services.

No words of mine can express the sense of obligation that I feel to Dr. Hillis for the more than brotherly love he showed me, nor to the Plymouth people for the beautiful spirit they manifested towards me. What other people would have accepted at a moment's notice the idea of a mission to be conducted by a total stranger, and have given him straightway the full treasure of their love and confidence? My heart fills with gratitude and affection when I think of it all. Plymouth Church, always to me one of the sacred shrines of the world, is henceforth my second home. The time during which I was associated with its life was brief indeed; but the nature of the association was such that the ties created were more strong and tender than are often created by years of common service. I accept with profound humility the beautiful saying of Dr. Raymond at the farewell meeting, "We have shared a Pentecost together." And therein is a bond which will endure till death, and beyond it.

And now as I look back upon the way that God has led me, I am filled with the calm assurance that in all these happenings I have but been the servant of the Divine Will. I have sought nothing; all has come to me. I have not chosen my course; it has been arranged for me.

I desire nothing, but to be the servant of the Divine Will, and to follow whithersoever it may lead me.

Early one morning during the Plymouth mission, when it was yet dark, I woke sobbing for joy. I could not explain my emotion; I cannot explain it now. All that I knew was that I felt a great sense of Divine uplifting, as though the infinite tenderness of God folded me round, and in my soul was the glad assurance that I was doing the work God had for me to do, and should be led and sustained in it. That is my feeling still. I know not where the new path may lead, but that in evangelism I must needs find such work as life may still have for me to do is an assurance, the clearest of the clear, which lies beyond all argument or question.

The Spirit of God already moves upon the face of the waters. New tides are beginning to flow in the life of the nations. The great Revival is coming—not an ethical revival only as some say, but a spiritual revival first, because the spiritual must precede the ethical. For myself, and for all who read my words, I pray that we may be ready, with alert feet and lighted lamps, to meet the Bridegroom, who even now draws nigh.

## II

### THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

*(Plymouth Church, Sunday, October 9th.)*

**M**Y subject is “ The Social Significance of Christian Love,” and the passage on which I shall base my address is found in 1 John iii. 14: “ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

We are told that when the scholars of the Bible Society undertake to translate the Bible into the tongues and dialects of heathen peoples, they frequently have to create the very words which express Christian truths, because the words do not exist. There is no word for sin, there is no word for redemption, in these various dialects and tongues of the heathen races, and the words do not exist, because the conception does not exist. The same thing may be said of the Christian conception of love as it was first pronounced and expounded among those great and decaying civilisations who first heard the message of Christianity. There was no word for love in the sense in which Christ



and His apostles used it. Love had a domestic, a sentimental, and a physical significance, but no moral and spiritual significance. It was a word deeply imbedded in the family life of mankind. It had a sentimental significance, illustrated in the poetry of the whole race. Above all, it was a synonym of physical sensation. To love, upon the lips of Christ and His apostles, meant none of these things. Love, as the great master-word of the new-born Church, was an absolutely new word, standing for a kind of passion which was new in human experience. It is little wonder that early persecutors of the Christian Church entirely misinterpreted the life of a community whose watchword was love, attributing to such communities the most abominable acts, because the word had become saturated with abominable meanings by pagan poets, by vile Emperors, and by the filthy imaginings of a corrupt people. How new and strange the word must have sounded then upon the lips of Christians may be measured by this text, which uses it as a boast, and as a test and watchword for a new kind of life. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." It was a word of new spiritual significance, it was also a word of new social significance, and it is of the new social significance of the word I wish to speak to-night.



We love, we love the brethren. Both words were new. It was by the utterance of these two words that Christianity broke up the empire of the old paganism, and created a new society and a new world. Measure the daring antithesis of this text. Life is represented by love and brotherhood, death by their absence. Where this new kind of love is not, there is death, dying societies, dying empires. Where Christ's love comes, there is the rejuvenation of the nation, of society, of the individual, and the creation of new empire. There is not a hair's breadth of exaggeration in that old missionary hymn, seldom sung now, which pictures the heathen dying day by day, and then invokes the Christian Church—

“ Fly, Christians, to their rescue fly,  
Preach Jesus to them e'er they die.”

It is historically true. Such communities are dying, and not through errors in spiritual knowledge only, or even chiefly. They are dying through lack of social love. You may understand this at once if you admit what seems to me too plainly and too tragically true of the civilisation of our own day, viz., that while materialism as a theory of the world is nearly extinct, materialism as a social force has still a grip upon us, producing daily all those rapa-

cious lusts which inflict injustice on the weak and make our social life a state of warfare. We need clearer conceptions of spiritual and theological truth, no doubt, but we need a great deal more the spirit and the temper of Jesus Christ in our social relationships, and that spirit is love. Notice, then, the daring antithesis of this passage. The life of a society is measured by the love of a society. Christianity is not dogma, it is conduct. "We know that we have passed from death unto life," not because we have acknowledged the supremacy of certain great theological truths, not because we wear the name of Jesus as an ornament, not because we write upon our phylacteries the shibboleths of a vain orthodoxy—"We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

How are we to arrive at any just apprehension, then, of this new and peculiar meaning which Christianity has attached to this word love? Naturally we must turn to Christ Himself, who alone can interpret for us what Christianity is and what Christianity was meant to be. Take first, then, one of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, uttered very early in His ministry, one of those words which may be quoted as a kind of key-note to the thoughts of our Lord: "For if ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publi-

cans the same? ” Now, how do you interpret that saying of our Lord’s? I interpret it, to mean this: It is a declaration of the insufficiency of domestic love as a social force. We often say that the family is the unit of the nation. Let a nation produce families knit together by firm affections, let the sacredness of kinship be realised, and let the religion of the hearth be honoured, and you will then build up a great and a prosperous nation. No doubt that is true; but, after all, it is only a partial truth, it is only a kind of half-truth. Why? Because there can be no more absolutely selfish force in the world than that kind of love which limits itself to its own kith and kin. Feudalism is sufficient to teach you that. The vital principle of feudalism was intense loyalty amongst families, tribes, and clans. And what was the result? A condition of constant warfare which split up society into scores of hostile camps. The love of one’s own clan meant an equal hatred of some other clan. Service to one’s own feudal lord meant hostility to all other feudal communities. Loyalty to one’s own kith and kin meant a determination to push their advantage at all costs, and to defeat all those who stood outside the charmed circle of relationship. And so the entire spirit of feudalism is summed up in the striking utterance of Wordsworth: it was

“The simple plan,  
That they should take who have the power,  
And they should keep who can.”

Feudalism seems a long way removed from these later times. Make no mistake about it, however, the spirit of feudalism still survives. It survives in self-centred families, who have no interest outside the well-being and the advancement of their own members. It survives in class feeling, in the existence of separate sects or castes in the community, united by a common bond of culture and wealth, and living a common life, but utterly disdainful and ignorant of the larger life that goes on round about them. It survives in the contempt of culture for ignorance, the freezing scorn of people who have artistic sensibilities for those who have none. It survives even in the great political parties, which are held together less by common principle than by a sense of common advantage. It is beside the point to say that all these different bodies of individuals have a true affection for their own members, that they can be generous, kindly, and magnanimous to each other. The fact remains that feudalism, wherever you find it, is anti-social. To love those who love you won't help society very much. To be loyal to your own kith and kin alone, is that a great advantage to humanity? From the Christian Christ demands something more than domestic

love—love for man as man. He demands the acknowledgment that all men are members of a common family, and it is from this kind of love alone that a truly Christian society can arise. By this, “we know that we have passed from death unto life,” not that we love our own, not that we are faithful to our friends, but that we love all men, and realise that they are our brethren in Christ Jesus.

Look again at the spirit of Jesus Christ as shown in His daily actions, and let one illustration suffice. If you turn to the Book of Leviticus, you will there come upon what may be called the *law of the leper*. Here it is: “And the leper, in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. He shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.” What a fate for a man whose disease is not his punishment but his misfortune! How terrible this life-long ostracism, open degradation, utter isolation, shame after shame heaped upon his head, no eye to regard him but with fear and repulsion, no hand stretched out in pity, no heart in which his memory is permitted to survive, a man already dead and buried while he lives! Behold the leper as he goes forth into the wilderness, accursed of man, yet a man who only yesterday dwelt amongst those who loved

him, who held his face familiar, who looked up into his eyes with kindness. Measure the awfulness of his fate—in a moment thrust out from the haunts of men, stripped of his wealth, clothed with indignity, henceforth tasting the bitterness of an exile which is all the more bitter and terrible because it is exile within sight of home, within sight of those joyous ways of life where he once moved in the gladness of his youth and the vigour of his manhood. “He shall dwell alone, without the camp shall his habitation be.” If he venture back but for a moment to the haunts of men, he shall be driven out with stones and curses, so cruel can men become under the influence of terror and repulsion. And I will ask you to remember that the terror and the repulsion are both natural, as those know who, like myself, have looked upon the lepers of the East. You cannot look upon a leper without a dreadful shrinking away of your whole person from him. These are natural feelings, but are they Christian? Let the Gospels answer, for do they not tell us how Jesus laid His hands of healing upon the lepers? Let the expositors of the Gospels answer, for does not the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tell us that “Christ also went without the camp, bearing our reproach”? It was without the camp the leper had to dwell. It was without the camp that Christ went, that He might seek and save that



which was lost. Here surely, then, there is a kind of love utterly different from any love that the world had known before—a love that had its root in a conception of humanity so full, so sensitive, and so catholic, that even the leper was included in it; and by this “we know that we have passed from death unto life,” that we are able to conquer our repulsion for man, even in his worst degradation, that our face is not averted even from the lowest and the vilest of mankind, that we also are willing to go without the camp of our well-ordered life, if by any means we can save some, that we do feel our brotherhood with the leper, our obligation to the disinherited, our kinship with the lost.

But while I have thus spoken, perhaps some of you have said in your minds, “After all, you are drawing a picture of that which happened a long while ago, and, moreover, you are quoting for our example the life of One who exceeded mankind in His charity as He did in His entire nature and character.” Let me, then, put beside the picture I have drawn, a picture taken not from the Gospels, not from the story of a life lived centuries ago—a picture drawn from the life of to-day. Have any of you ever read Robert Louis Stevenson’s letter concerning Father Damien? I will quote from it. Passing over entirely those earlier passages in which the scorn of Stevenson is poured out, and justly



poured out, upon the comfortable Christian minister who thought it his business to defame Damien while he knew little of his work and less of his character, I wish to lay emphasis only on the passages in that letter which describe the actual conditions of Damien's work. Here is the picture of the life upon the island of Molokai as Stevenson saw it. "Crowded," says he, "with abominable deformations of our common manhood, a population such as surrounds us in the horror of a nightmare, every fourth face a blot upon the landscape, the butt ends of human beings lying there almost unrecognisable, but still breathing, still thinking, still remembering." Here is a description of Damien's work: "Damien went there, and shut to with his own hand the door of his own sepulchre, and made his great renunciation, and slept that first night under a tree with his rotting brethren, alone with pestilence, and looking forward with what courage (with what pitiful shrinkings of dread God only knows) to a lifetime of dressing sores and stumps." You know the sequel of the story, how Damien lived there and died there, sharing at last the disease of these outcast creatures, and uplifted in his sufferings by their love as he had uplifted them by his devotion. Now, do you know any kind of love that would inspire a man to live a life like that except the love of Christ constraining him

into a great love for humanity? Domestic love obviously failed in this case. It is rare indeed that wife or parent will accompany a leper to his lonely exile, and that sentimental form of human pity which we cover under the fine phrase, enthusiasm for humanity, failed too, for society in the South Seas to-day is content, just as society was content in the days of Moses, to thrust out the leper and to be done with him, and to ask no questions about his fate. Where domestic love fails, and where sentimental pity fails, there Christian love comes in. That love for man as man which Christ felt you see re-kindled in the heart of this poor Belgian priest, and that love blossoms out into a life of the noblest heroism. The pagan world knew nothing of a love of that kind; aye, and the world of conventional Christians knows nothing about it either; but the true Christian knows it. By this we may know we have passed from death unto life: by asking ourselves whether in our hearts we are able to think of and to love the lepers of Molokai as our brethren.

But why should I go to the South Seas and to Father Damien and to Robert Louis Stevenson for my illustrations when I can find illustrations under my very eye in the life of to-day? Recently there stood up in the lecture-hall of my own church a woman who, for the first time, opened her lips in public. She got up to tell us

how, by the grace of God, she had been recovered from a condition of what seemed hopeless drunkenness. She was a woman born into good society, accomplished, speaking four languages, a fine musician, widely travelled, and yet she had sunk into the lowest gutter of inebriety, thrust out by her friends, left to perish, and discovered by a Salvation Army woman, who took her, with all her repulsiveness, straight away to the Salvation Army Home for Inebriates; and so little did the family of that woman love her, although they are wealthy people, moving in good society, that they have never paid that Salvation Army captain for the cab fare. This woman comes once more before the world after eighteen months of suffering and struggle reclaimed. You would say now domestic love will surely come in, now the sense of kith and kin will be revived, now her friends will open their arms to receive her. No, no. Her children are told she is dead. Her husband wishes to see no more of her. Her own mother consents to meet her only at a public restaurant; and the woman told me how she went, with what a turbulent heart within her, and with what a yearning for the love of her mother. But the reception she got was so freezing cold she could not endure it, and she said, "I began to ask myself whether it paid to be good, and I turned from my own mother and came back to

that Salvation Army woman, the mother of my soul, for I knew that in her I had a love which no one else could give me." Ah! was not Christ right when He said, if we only love those who love us, what reward have we? Some of us, perhaps, have friends who have cost us grief and shame and misery, and we know how we feel about them. We don't wish to see them again. We prefer to forget them, and—God forgive us—we almost wish they were dead. That is the natural feeling of grieved and wronged and betrayed human love. We are no worse than our fellows, it may be, when we acknowledge such feelings. But Christ demands that if we are Christians we should be much better than our fellows, and much better than the best of our fellows according to the flesh. And, oh! what force is there that can make us feel kind even to our own kith and kin who have bruised and hurt and put us to shame by their conduct? What but the love of Him who, being sinless, bore the sins of others, who, being just, died for the unjust that He might bring us to God, and never complained of the injustice of it? Human love failed that poor woman in her worst need. Where human love fails, Christ's love comes in to the rescue, and by this "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

I proclaim, then, that there is only one kind of

love that is truly social—that is to say, there is only one kind of love which is able to regenerate and to unite society—and that is the kind of love which Jesus has taught the world. I am coming to see that it is of a very little use to talk to any class of men about their obligations and their duties to some other class. “Duty,” says Ibsen, in one of his dramas, “is a cold, hard word,” and obligation is a still colder and a yet harder word. We may talk to the rich till we are dumb with much talking about their obligations to the ignorant and the uninstructed; and to the refined about their obligations to the barbarous and the brutal. The general conscience is not sensitive enough to respond to such appeals. The crust of class and caste is too thick to be penetrated by these toy arrows of mere argument. We must melt the obstacle. We cannot penetrate it, just as we cannot pierce the iceberg, which floats, a glittering peril, on the mid-Atlantic; but it can be dissolved in the warm tides of love, as the iceberg is dissolved when the warm Gulf Stream flows around its base. No man ever yet took up work among the poor from a mere sense of obligation, or if he did, I am sure he soon grew weary in well-doing. And if there are any of you here who are engaged in such work I appeal to you to tell me whether you have ever done such work merely from a sense of social obligation, or whether it

has not always been done because you have felt the sense of social love? We must love the poor before we can really help them. We must love them in their lowest and most repulsive aspects. We must love them with that Divine charity which "believeth all things and hopeth all things." We must honour them as Christ did, beholding still upon "their foreheads the secret star from the Benediction on the Mount." By this we know whether we are a people trying to fulfil an obligation or are a people who have the genuine love of souls; whether we are doing our work from a sense of duty or from a passion for souls: do we *love* the brethren?

But you may say, "How are we to accomplish an act which, according to your own showing, is so manifestly difficult to human nature?" By remembering one thing which Jesus Christ never forgot—it was the key-note of all His thoughts—we must remember the divinity of human nature. There is, as Mr. T. G. Selby has reminded us, "a buried magnificence" in many a man of whom you think ill, and have reason to think ill, just as yonder, out in the vast desert, but a little way down beneath the brown sand, the drift of centuries, there often lies a city with all its temples, its palaces, its marbles, and its paintings, perfect and complete. For centuries men ride to and fro across the desert, and the great caravans pass from



East to West, and no one sees anything more than the desert and the drifted sand there. Yet all the time the hidden city is there; and some day there comes one who knows, and he begins to dig, and there comes to light a splendour that was hidden, a picture that was covered up. So in many a man there is a hidden temple, there is a buried splendour. Nay, I should not say in many a man; it is in every man, only we have not the faith to believe it, and we have not the eyes to discover it. Have you ever heard Dvorak's "Symphony to the New World" performed? I need not tell you it is a magnificent piece of music. When I first heard it, as the great symphony went on I was strangely impressed with a curious sense of something familiar about it. I could not make it out. There was the great orchestra playing what sounded magnificent music—and it was magnificent music—yet all the while I seemed to hear behind it something I had heard a thousand times before, and then I found out what it was. Why, the "Symphony to the New World" is made up, for the main part, of negro melodies and plaintive airs, such as "Swing low, sweet chariot." Mere negro melodies! Little delicate threads of song begotten in the souls of slaves! Ah, but see what a great musician can make of them! So there is a little thread of divinest melody running through the poor heart



of man. Christ takes these threads of melody into His own most perfect life, and shows what the music of humanity is; and looking at Christ in His perfection, we look through Christ to man in his deepest degradation, and we see that the man lowest in the mire has the thread of melody in his heart, which may become a great music in Christ. It is there waiting to be discovered, and we must remember the dignity of human nature if we are to begin to feel about man as Christ felt.

I remember years ago, when the life of Livingstone was published, being greatly impressed by a certain episode Livingstone described—a poor African woman lying by the roadside afflicted with a peculiarly repulsive disease. The picture was so vivid that it made me shudder, for I was at that period of youth which is ultra-sensitive to pain; and I wondered how Livingstone could bring himself even to touch that dreadful woman by the roadside. And then I read on, and as I read on, I came across words of such passionate tenderness that before I had finished the page I understood how it was that Livingstone could touch that poor, repulsive woman with her dreadful disease. He saw in her a creature for whom Christ died. He saw in her a fragment of God Himself. He recognised that this soul, dumb, confused, ignorant, was still an immortal soul compared

with which, in value, all the gold of Ophir and all the diamond-fields of South Africa were but as the dust in the balance. Surely it was that conviction of the divinity in man, and that alone, which could have nerved Livingstone to endure his life of solitary toil among savage races who seemed scarcely human. And was not the faith that Livingstone had in the divinity of human nature justified when, many years later, there emerged from that Dark Continent those two faithful servants of his, who bore his body over land and sea to its place of honourable rest in Westminster Abbey? Livingstone's faith in the African race was vindicated. Faith in mankind is vindicated still. It is a very striking thing that those who know most about human nature in its worst aspects are those who think the best of it. It is so. It is not among those who handle and see the open sores of humanity that you will find despair of humanity. They know too much of the infinite depths of patience and sweetness and kindness that are concealed beneath the grime of sin and ignorance, and it is not among these that you find the pessimist and the cynic. The pessimist and the cynic are those who stand afar off and pass by on the other side. Those who handle the wounded traveller know him best. Bring love, not scorn, to your task, and you will always find that your love is justified as the one Divine force for the

social regeneration of mankind. Men know the man who loves them. Dull as they may be, they are able to discern the difference, believe me, between the man who serves them for obligation and the man who serves them for love. The miraculous ministry is always the loving ministry. "I could tell you," said a friend of Father Dolling, "of miracles of healing that have been wrought by Dolling." And then he goes on to give an instance of how a young soldier said to him, "Father Dolling laid his hand upon my head, and I don't know why, but I told all that I had ever done." Ah! but we know why. We know that there is often more of the Gospel of love in a touch, in a glance, in a hand-grasp, than there is many a sermon.

Oh! brothers and sisters, if you are far from God, there is a hand laid upon you, even now, the hand that was pierced for you. Friends may have cast you out; there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Domestic love may have failed you in your worst need. The love of Christ cannot fail you, leper as you are, stained with gross sin, and hating yourself for your sin. Look up into the eyes of Christ. You will find no repulsion there, only love, pity, pardon; and in the hour when you thus come to Christ with a heart broken and softened with a sense of His Divine love for you, you also shall pass from death unto life and become a new

## SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LOVE 81

creature in Christ Jesus. Brother, sister, come! Cast out by man, there is still hospitality in the heart of God for you, for me, for us all, and for the whole wide world.

“ For the love of God is wider  
Than the measures of man's mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.”

### III

## OUR DUTY TO THE BYSTANDER

*(Plymouth Church, Sunday Morning, November 13, 1904.)*

**M**Y subject this morning is: "Our Duty to the Bystander," and my text will be found in John xi. 42: "But because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me." There is a life of little perspective and there is a life of large perspective. There is a personal view of life and a collective view of life; there is a life circumscribed by its own hopes and gains; there is a life which merges itself in the world's life, and "he only lives in the world's life who has renounced his own." Jesus gives us a sublime example of a life of large perspective. We are too much accustomed to see life at a point, at an angle: Jesus saw life as a whole and in its completeness. Look for a moment upon the scene which is presented to us in this chapter. Here are broken hearts gathered round a grave. Here is the wreck and ruin and disaster of a household. Before the eyes of Jesus stand Martha, with her fortitude quite gone; Mary, with her quiet despair; and a group of weeping

friends, who can see nothing in all the universe beyond the grave of Lazarus. Here is surely enough to fill the eye, enough to absorb the sympathy; but even in this climax of personal emotion the eye of Jesus rests upon something that lies beyond the circumference of personal emotion. He sees not one broken household, but many; not one tortured heart, but the heart of the world itself with all its wounds. He sees the people that stand by. He thinks of them, and so, when Jesus prays for the miraculous power of God to descend upon Him, we are told, "Because of the people that stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

Now how are we to interpret this phrase for our edification and instruction? Let me interpret it by one of the plainest facts in human nature, namely, the natural tendency there is in human life toward isolation and selfishness. There are few things in life more selfish than our love and our grief. Even our love is selfish. We bind another to our delight. We elect the object of our love and straightway we seek to surround the object with a jealous and sacred isolation. Let your thoughts range for a single instant over the lyric love-poetry of the world, over the great fictions of the world, and is not the note which is continually struck this note of isolation as the prerogative of love? There is a

kind of love which draws its magic circle around its object, builds its guarded paradise, holds it a sacred thing to reserve itself from human contact, and seeks in all things separation from the world's life. Still more selfish is our grief. It is the prescriptive right of grief to seek isolation from the world. The very symbols of mourning are the drawn blind and the closed door and the separate and sad way. Grief projects its own personal emotion over the whole world, and so, when Beatrice dies, Dante looks upon the crowded city of Florence, with all its gay and intricate and splendid life, and says, "How is the city desolate that was full of people." The city did not exist for him. He forgot the bystander. The broken heart, as well as the heart surfeited with love, is always prone to forget the bystander.

Now the striking thing in the temper of our Lord is that He was absolutely free from these tendencies.

Love, as Jesus understood the word, is a big word, a catholic word, an immeasurable word. "If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye?" said Jesus; and thus it is in the name of love that Christ protests against the narrowness of love. For love, as Christ conceives it, is an immense wave of charity, a living warmth of soul. It touches not only one's kith and kin, but the lonely and the outcast. "It makes the



whole world kin"—it remembers the bystander. Where does Christ get His conception of a love such as this? He finds the sanction of this kind of love in the nature of God Himself. Have you ever considered the words in which Jesus described the nature of God—how strange, how original, how revolutionary they must have sounded to those who heard them?—"He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and is kind to the unthankful also." Why, in that single sentence Christ destroyed the whole structure of Judaism: He destroyed the theory of a peculiar people, an elect race, a chosen tribe, governed and led by a tribal God; He revealed God as caring for the bystanders, caring for the outsiders, caring for the race—His love, like sunshine, falling with a glad warmth and equal diffusion of light upon all men, whatever their condition and whatever their degree of hostility to the Divine Father. I take it that that saying of Christ's is the greatest truth ever uttered by human lips, and the most startling.

Just as Jesus denied the right of love to love only its chosen object and rest there, so Jesus denied the right to sorrow to think only of itself. Here is a man who comes to Jesus and presents what might seem the most sacred kind of plea to be excused from the service of the race. He says: "My father is dead; let me go and bury

my father, and then I will think about this great matter of serving the race." Jesus replies, "Let the dead bury their dead: follow thou Me." Does that reply seem strange, hard, inexplicable? It is not so, when you see its true meaning, which is, that the needs of the race must always stand before all personal claims and even before all personal sorrows, however sacred; and Christ's own conduct makes the principle clear. The day comes when His own mother stands outside upon the edge of the crowd and hears what seems to be a repudiation of the claims of motherhood when He says, "Those who do the will of God are my sister and my mother." And the day comes, the darker day, when Jesus hangs upon the Cross, and surely if the human soul might claim its own loneliness it is there, surely if the spirit of man might ask to be uninterrupted it is in that final and tragic hour; yet Jesus is interrupted by the dying thief and allows the man to interrupt the sacred silence of the Cross with his plea for pity. Even on the Cross Jesus remembered the bystander. Here, then, it seems to me, is a profound truth. Here is the clue to Christ's thoughts and emotion and temper. This is His message to the world: the first of all Christian ethics is to think of others, and to think of others before we think of ourselves. Christ's life is a life of large perspective. He sees, not

the personal aspect only, but the collective. He sees, not the immediate only, but the distant. No anguish of heart can excuse our forgetfulness of the agony of others. Affection and hatred, regarded from this point of view, are both narrow passions, for either of them may isolate us from our fellow-men; and isolation from man always means distance from God. Therefore we also must remember the bystander.

The key-note of Christ's message must be the key-note of our message also, aye, and the key-note of our life. The man who walks along the paths of his ordered life and never remembers the people that stand by does not understand the spirit of Jesus. "Well," you will say, "what are we to remember about the bystander?"

First of all, I would reply with what seems to be so trite a thing that it sounds almost foolish: First of all, you are to remember that the bystander exists. And perhaps it is not so foolish a statement, after all, if you recollect that the plainest fact about our social life is this temper of isolation. We are all apt to forget that the bystander so much as exists. Look at it in regard to nationality. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth," says the Apostle; and if that be true the plain corollary is universal human brother-

hood. But what was the condition of the world, considered socially, at the time when Paul spoke? It had Rome, with its immense pride of power, tramping across Europe, making a desolation and calling it peace; and it had Greece, with its immense pride of intellect, regarding all other nations outside the charmed circle of its culture as barbarians. Here were two great nations, creating a ring-fence of privilege, and counting all nations outside that fence of privilege outcast. One of the things that always fills me with astonishment, as I read the history of Rome, is the cruelty of Rome. It fills me with amazement to think that a people that had such a magnificent mastery of the fine arts and had done such magnificent work in literature could still be cruel enough to have an amphitheatre where men were butchered to make a Roman holiday. But the explanation is simple enough. It was the bitter contempt that Rome had for humanity that made her cruel. She laid it down as a principle, that the gladiator had no rights, no claims to consideration. He was meant to be a slave, born to be a creature of a lower order. Rome forgot the bystander. The Roman Empire was thus an empire built on slavery, and that was the secret of its corruption and of its final downfall.

Rome perished because she forgot the bystander, and the fact is of deep significance for

us. Let me try to make this significance clear by a single question—Is there any just and incontrovertible reason why there should not be a United States of America and Europe—English, American, French, German, Austrian, Italian, Spanish, Russian—all united in one peaceful and progressive federation? They are of one blood, brethren by titles manifold. They follow a common learning, they share common institutions, they have a common faith, yet they are divided, are suspicious of each other, and bitterly hostile. And why? Because the arrogance of a false patriotism is constantly fomenting strife and misunderstanding.

This false patriotism does something more and something worse; it provokes wars. It is the very essence of false patriotism to ridicule and defame other nations, to gibe and jeer at their peculiarities, to underrate their abilities, to expose their vices, and to flaunt our own superiority. “We are the people; there is none beside.” So we speak, and the result is uncounted millions wasted on warlike preparations, and rings of forts upon the frontiers, and standing armies and financial extravagance followed by national poverty and a growing spirit of distrust and hatred, which at any time may break forth in the red flame of war. We are all apt to forget the bystander in these international rivalries, to think of other people

as inferior, to talk of their defects, and to forget their virtues. And it is that temper which has been at the root of every great war that has stained the earth with blood.

The first thing, if we would reach a better age, is that we must remember the existence of the bystander; remember that he is a man like ourselves; that he has tastes and powers and emotions the same as our own; remember that he lives and suffers and endures and has great virtues. Jesus never forgot the bystander, and that is why "the common people heard Him gladly."

Then the next thing we have to remember about the bystander is, not only that he exists, but that he has needs that make a demand upon us. That was precisely what Jesus was remembering in this scene. Will you look again upon this group of people at the graveside? Will you remember that these people were mostly Pharisees, the friends of the dead Lazarus? We know what Christ thought about Pharisees. We know that they had no sympathy with His ideals. It is one of the most awful facts of the Gospels, to my mind, that the harshest and most terrible words that Jesus speaks are spoken to the people you would call good people. The vices which Christ denounces most bitterly are not the vices that defile the flesh, but those which ruin the spirit—



pride, bitterness, malice. And round the grave of Lazarus there stand the very people whom He found most repulsive, intractable, and antagonistic to Him—a group of Pharisees! Yet He remembers them, and because of these people that stand by—people antagonistic to Him at every point—He said this word, “that they might believe.”

We have to remember the needs of the bystander. The greater the ignorance, the bitterer the hostility, the more intractable the temper of the bystander may be, the greater need he has of us. Where there is need there is obligation, and we dare no more refuse to fulfil our obligation on the grounds of personal antipathy than the surgeon or doctor dare refuse to attend a certain man because his manners are not satisfactory or his countenance ugly. Here is a matter that touches the life of our Churches very closely. Dr. Dale once said, in a phrase which was often quoted against him, that Congregationalism stood for the aristocracy of the middle class. It was an unfortunate statement to have made, because it has led to the natural inference that Congregationalism has stood only, and stands only, for a certain class; and if we are going to gather together in our Churches only a certain class—the people we like and the people who like us, the people of a similar social grade, the people of a similarly



cultivated taste—what we are doing is creating clubs but we are not creating Churches.

We shall never get our thinking upon these themes right until we substitute for the word “charity,” the word “claim.” It is not charity men ask of us, it is opportunity. We say that we believe in the immortal soul that is in man. If we do, can we “to men benighted the lamp of life deny”? There is no more terrible picture in all the teaching of Christ than the picture of the man who forgot the bystander. His name was Dives and the bystander was a beggar at the gate, called Lazarus; and Dives came out of his house, through prosperous years, and never so much as saw the beggar in his rags; and the torture, the agony, the punishment of Dives was that in the other world he had to remember what he had forgotten here: the bystander, and the claim of the bystander.

Once more, you have to remember not only the existence of the bystander and the need of the bystander, but you have to remember the possibilities of the bystander, “that they might believe.” And Jesus said that about the Pharisees, about the men who hated Him, men who were forging the nails of His Cross, “that they might believe”! Shortly before I left London I bought at a bookseller’s a little book on radium. It was written by a boy of eighteen—a boy educated in the common public schools,

who, in his garret, under the grey roofs of London, had worked out for himself certain conclusions upon radium, and had had the courage to publish his book; and a reviewer, in speaking of it, said something like this: "Under these grey, commonplace roofs of London and in these bare garrets are the masters of science who will shape the future." Ah, my friends, there is something more wonderful under the grey roofs of Brooklyn, of New York, of London this morning; there are the spiritual captains of the future; there are the leaders who are to fight the battle of advancing progress and liberty; there are the martyrs who are to carry the name of Jesus to the dark places of the earth. Luther lay under such a grey roof once, and Livingstone, and Simon Peter. Who would have thought of finding apostles in fishermen? Only Jesus. But Jesus, who had lain in huts where poor men lie, knew of the treasure in the hut of the poor man and went straight to the fisherman's hut to find apostles. He remembered the possibilities that are in the bystander.

You know there are two ways of viewing human life. One I might call the microscopic and the other the telescopic. A great many writers of our own day use the microscopic method only. They look through a lighted lens and see a feeble creature full of weaknesses, and

say, "That is man." So it is. Ah, but there is a telescopic way, too, of regarding man, and you are not going to see man aright until you see him from an astronomic point of view, in relation to the stars, and to the rhythm of the universe, and as a citizen of immensity. Why, you cannot even see the tiny thread of an insect's organism aright until you see it in relation to the universal scheme of life. You cannot see the grain of sand aright till you perceive it as one in substance with the starry worlds that wheel above us, nor the raindrop aright till you see it lifted into clouds and woven into rainbows. The microscope only tells a part of the truth. There is another part, and the major part of the truth, which lies not in the perception of the infinitely small, but of the infinitely great. And it is so with man. Here is what the microscope tells you: "Dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return." Here is what the telescope tells you: "Now are we the sons of God"—you, I—the sons of God. And if you want to understand this startling truth, take a man like Jacob—bring him out and put him under the microscope. Look at him; rogue, thief, liar. He is all that; a man of the earth, earthy. You are likely to say, "There is not much possibility *there* of the development of a soul." Bring him out beneath the stars, put him in relation to the eternities, and what do you find? The man

begins to dream, and he is not dreaming about herds and cattle; he is dreaming about God. He has visions, visions not of wealth, but of angels ascending and descending upon a stair of light. Oh, it is true enough, that he is a rogue, a cheat, a liar, but it is also true that there is a little spiritual fibre in him that I may call a soul, capable of receiving the vibrations of the Divine light, and answering to them: and I must understand Bethel as well as Padan-aram before I can understand Jacob.

And so I look beyond these walls this morning to the Jacobs of this vast city, to the men who are stealing fortunes, or going through any amount of dirty work to get them, and I remember Jacob, and I know that somewhere in the man who is hardest there is a little quivering nerve, a tiny spiritual fibre—there is a rudimentary soul—there is something capable of vibrating to God. And this is the ground, and the only ground, for my hope and my faith this morning: that there is a capacity for God in every one who is listening to me now. Every human soul is a point of contact with the Infinite. I tell you what you know to be true—that all the power of Jesus Christ is rushing toward that point of contact in your heart and life now. Just as the Marconi message flies straight to the instrument that is keyed up to pitch to receive it, you may be keyed up to pitch

to receive the incoming of God in Jesus Christ. You—and all men—any man.

Of all these vast populations around us to-day, of the million and three hundred thousand people in Brooklyn, there is not one who is not a saint in embryo; not one who has not a little of the spiritual fibre that might make an apostle; and every lost soul is an accusation against the Church and every ruined life is ruined through the apostasy of the Church. “It is not the will of the Father,” said Jesus, “that one of these little ones should perish.” Whose will is it, then? Why, yours and mine, when we go upon our blind, selfish way and forget the bystander.

And so I observe, lastly, that Jesus was justified in His attitude to the bystander. He loved the people. He loved the common people, and the people loved Him. Why, it was one who stood by, was it not, who washed His feet with tears, and who wiped them with the hair of her head—“a woman who was a sinner”? It was one who stood by, a woman out of whom He had cast seven devils, who was last at the Cross and the first at the sepulchre, and O what a soul there must have been in that woman whom we know as Mary Magdalene! It was one who stood by who looked at the gathering darkness around the Cross and said what no priest, what no ruler in Israel had the grace or vision to say: “This is a just man. This is the Son of God.”

## OUR DUTY TO THE BYSTANDER 97

It was one who stood by, a robber and malefactor, who offered to Jesus in the last moment of his life the fragrance of his penitence, the frankincense of his love. Jesus was justified in His estimate of the bystander. My brethren, He waits to be justified in us. Is there any one here this morning who would refuse a really loyal and tender friendship if it were offered him? Why, no. The world is too lonely for us to refuse love or friendship from any heart capable of loving us; and Jesus offers us Himself. He would be your friend, your Saviour, your Redeemer. He stretches out to you His hand, the hand wounded for your transgressions. He opens to you His heart, the heart bruised for your iniquities. Ah, shall we not even now, each for himself and herself, make the glad and sweet confession—

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want,  
More than all in thee I find”?

And He who was the people's Christ shall surely have the people's love. Yea, “He shall have the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.”



## IV

### THE UNAVOIDABLE CHRIST

*(Plymouth Church, Sunday Evening, November 13, 1904.)*

THE text I am going to speak upon to-night is found in John xx. 26: "Then came Jesus, the door being shut, and stood in the midst." The doors were shut. Not only the doors of the room where the disciples met, but the doors of the mind, the doors of the reason, the doors of hope and faith. There can be no doubt that Thomas, the chief figure in this pathetic story, had finally rejected the thought of Christ's resurrection. He believed that he had seen the end of Jesus. Something of Christ might yet live in the thoughts of men as an influence, a memory, an impulse, just as the dead flower leaves a certain perfume behind it, but the flower of this Divine life would bloom no more, and the perfume of that life would be a diminishing perfume. It is so with all dead men. When once the active, living presence is withdrawn the memory of the dead, however well beloved, grows faint and fades. The doors were shut then, the impenetrable doors of the sepulchre against which the frail hands



of love beat and bled in vain; the doors of the reason, the doors of faith, and "then came Jesus." In spite of the closed doors He stood in the midst. Henceforth He was to fill all things. He was to take possession of the world; He was to glide with the softness and potency of light into the darkest hut where poor men lay, into the secret chamber of the rich man's palace, and into the sealed shrines of the pagan temple. He was the unavoidable Christ, the Christ who was to be met everywhere, fulfilling His great and strange word: "Lo, I am with you all the days to the consummation of the age."

This, then, is my theme to-night: "The Unavoidable Christ." Broadly stated, what it means is this: that it is impossible for any one of us to order our lives in such a way as to avoid Christ. Like some great, snow-clad dome, Christ rises over the landscape of human life and history, and turn your eyes where you will, in any direction, you cannot escape His presence. Every path leads to Him, for in every path there is a Cross. He has linked His life with the general life of man at so many points that, however hostile or indifferent we may be to Him, yet we have to say, "Whither can I flee from Thy Spirit?" And Christ did this deliberately. He had no need to write His teachings upon perishable parchments, because He

interwove Himself in the very fibres of human life. He has made it impossible for us to think of any salient aspect of human life without thinking of Him. Where love is, there is Christ. Where the poor are, there is the Divine poor Man, who says, "Whoso does a kindness unto one of these does it unto Me." Nay, more, so interwoven is His story with human thought that where childhood is, there is Bethlehem; where sorrow is, there is Gethsemane; where death is, there is Calvary. Instinctively our thoughts meet and gather and settle around the sacred pictures of Christ's life and death. In all that concerns our own living and our own dying our thoughts are drawn toward Jesus.

So then, you may avoid the church, and you may avoid the Bible, and you may avoid the company of Christian people, but you cannot avoid Jesus Christ. He will meet you where you least think of Him. He will meet you on the race-course, on the football field, in the office, or in the home. He will look at you with sad eyes in the house of shameful pleasure. He will pass you in the street, in the garb of a beggar and outcast; He will sit beside you in the solitary room where you nurse the remembered sweetness of your sin or rage against yourself for your folly. Shut the door against Him. Bar it firm with hostility and hatred! Nevertheless you cannot escape Christ: "The door

being shut, Jesus came and stood in the midst."

Now there are many illustrations of this phenomenon. Let me recall, for instance, the name of the famous German poet, Heine. You, who have read any of his poetry and who know anything of his life, will remember how he raged against the justice of God; how, as he lay on the mattress-grave, suffering inexplicable agony and loneliness, he said that the irony of the Almighty lay heavy upon him. Do you remember, too, that when he came to the end of his life he said this—Heine, the brilliant poet, the master of irony himself: "At last I have to stand upon the same platform with Uncle Tom." Or another illustration. You remember in the life of George Eliot how she tells you she translated Strauss' "Life of Jesus" till she was Strauss-sick; working upon the book, translating the passages that dissolved the Christian faith into nebulous shadows, with a crucifix before her, and only able to continue her toil by an effort of the will which triumphed over her spiritual sensibilities. And this same woman, a little later, is painting for you Dinah Morris preaching on the village green and announcing this great Gospel, this evangelical message, which came, not only from the lips of Dinah Morris, but from the heart of Dinah Morris's creator, "Our blessed Saviour has shown us what God's heart

is, and what are His feelings toward us." George Eliot could not escape the Christ. The unavoidable Christ entered into her life. Go back further. You remember the striking and wonderful legend which we speak of as "Quo Vadis"—how Peter a second time plays the coward and turns away from Rome because the shadow of death is falling over the city, and flies across the Campagna, and, as he flies, is met by a vision of his Master—

"Lo, on the darkness brake a wandering ray,  
A vision flashed along the Appian way;  
Divinely on the pagan night it shone,  
A mournful Face, a Figure hurrying on;  
Though haggard, and dishevelled, frail and worn,  
A King of David's lineage, crowned with thorn.  
'Lord, whither farest?' Peter, wondering, cried.  
'To Rome,' said Christ, 'to be re-crucified.'  
Into the night the vision ebbed like breath,  
And Peter turned and rushed on to Rome and death."

Why is that legend so significant? Because it tells you why Christ is unavoidable in human life. He is so much part of human life that life is being constantly judged and measured by His example and His spirit. Peter sees the heroism of Jesus and he cannot be a coward; and, in the same way, this great and wonderful thing was to happen in the world, that millions of men were to make the thought of Christ, the spirit of Christ, the temper of Christ, the tribunal of their own judgment. And so in the Apostolic

writings this note is struck continually. Men are told to forgive each other. Why? Because God for Christ's sake forgave them. Masters are told to be kind to their servants. Why? Because they have a Master in heaven. Servants are told to be obedient to their masters. Why? Because there was One who took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death. And, as the shadows of persecution gather, the cry rings out, like a great trumpet, "Confess the truth, remembering Him who confessed before Pontius Pilate. Suffer the death, remembering Him who suffered and died, that you may reign with Him." Christ has so entered into the human life that you cannot live without the thought of Christ. Consciously or unconsciously Christ is with us always, and our life is constantly overshadowed with His gracious personality.

From time to time there are certain books published which picture human events as they might be if Christ returned again. There was, for example, Mr. Stead's book a few years ago, entitled, "If Christ came to Chicago." If Christ came to Chicago? There is no "if," *there is no "if."* The very title of such a book appears to me to be a kind of faithlessness or falseness, for Christ has never gone away. Christ has seen every stone of Chicago, every stone of Brooklyn, of New York, of London,

laid. He has heard every cry of the eternal beast that lurks beneath the polished surfaces of your modern society. He has witnessed every vote given for unjust laws and has moved through every crowd, maddened by injustice or intoxicated with brutal pride—

“ Every cruel thought and plan  
Of the cruel heart of man  
Tho’ but whispered He can hear.”

Sometimes, of late, during those tumultuous periods through which my own nation has passed, it has happened to me to walk through Trafalgar Square in London and to look up at the great grey figure of Nelson above the roar of the vast multitude below, and I have thought, as I passed the base of the pillar and have looked upward to that heroic statue, “ Surely if ever this people forgets the voice of country and forgets the love of duty, that voice will speak with its message of duty and heroism.” There is a true sense in which Nelson, standing high above the yellow fogs of London and its toiling millions, is still speaking. Ah, there is an infinitely truer sense in which Jesus stands in the very central roar of our great cities, no dead effigy, no figure of stone, but the living Christ, to rebuke and to uplift us. Know that He is here, know that He is unavoidable. He is part of the air we breathe, of the life we live, of the



very atmosphere in which our thought pulsates. Whether we admit it or not, we live in Christ's America, in Christ's England, and there is not a drop of blood in our veins that is not coloured with the blood of Christ; there is not a throb of thought in our brain that is not thrilling with the impact of that life of lives, which moves through all men and lives through all time.

The unavoidable Christ. "Well," I think I can hear some one say, "no doubt there is a transcendental sense in which that is all true, but here am I, living a young man's life in a great crowded city—what have you to say to me?" And here is some one else who says: "No doubt what you say is historically true. I am not so unintelligent as not to be aware of the fact that the Galilean has conquered and that His story has taken possession of the minds and imaginations and literature and schools and temples of the world, but what has that to do with me?" And yet another says: "I am a very sinful creature. I have gone down the ladder, rung by rung. I am lost to truth and honour, and if I could tell you just who I am and the things I have done, and all the leprous spots that are upon my memory and conscience, you would turn your back on me. What is the use of talking to me about the unavoidable Christ?" And so I might go on trying to read the silent histories in your faces; but, notwithstanding,

whoever you may be, though I do not know what your history is, this I do know, this I affirm, this I am certain of: the unavoidable Christ is yours. You cannot escape Him.

For instance, Jesus is with you, my brother, the moment you begin to think about yourself. You cannot prevent Him being with you. What is the oldest question of the world? The oldest question of the world is, "Who am I, what am I, whither am I moving?" Every man has asked himself that question, and when you go home to-night you will shut the door, and in the silence of the night that question will come back to you, "Who am I, what am I, whither am I travelling?" And you will reply: "Well, at least I know what I seem to be. I seem to be a kind of animal with just enough of something different in my nature to make me conscious of my animalism and to be dissatisfied with it. I am a little dust. Presently the dust will be blown by the winds of fate far and wide, and I suppose that will be the end of me." No sooner have you said that than through the closed door a Presence has entered; Jesus has taken up the problem. He says: "No, you are a child of God; you may be perfect, even as the Father in heaven is perfect. You are a living soul. You are greater than all the mass of physical matter; than the earth, with all its cities, and the sky with all its rushing worlds, because you

will endure when these have passed away ”; and you cannot ignore that voice. You may not believe it, but you cannot ignore it. Whenever a man sits down to think about himself, what is he and what may be his destiny, Christ comes to him, and the great commanding voice of the Divine Teacher asserts itself.

Christ is with you the moment you begin to think about your conduct. To-morrow you will go down into the thick of business. You will enter your office or your warehouse and you will close the door. You will say, “ Here at least I am safe from the impertinent interruption of babblers on religion. I was a fool to go to Plymouth Church last night. But now I am my own man again, and I have shut the door, and I can do as I like with my own. If I like to cheat, this is my affair. If I can drive a hard bargain, who is to hinder me? If I like to be unjust and rapacious and grind the faces of the poor and snatch at every mean advantage, who is to know? ” Even as you speak the air of the office quivers and vibrates with a Presence. Jesus comes, “ the door being shut.” He makes you think of a very different standard of conduct which He Himself practised and taught to millions. He makes you aware of another and diviner sort of life which has been lived in the world, and is being lived. And His quiet voice assails the ear of the spirit—“ Behold this

nobler, greater, more sufficing life—will ye also be My disciples? ”

It is one of the curses of modern life that we are growing crazy over our pleasures and indifferent to our duties, and there are some of you whose pleasures are shameful and secret. They are pleasures behind closed doors. You shut the door and say, “ Here no eye will see me. The darkness shall cover me, and in the grey of the morning light I will rise and steal away—who will know? ” And even as you speak, the Christ, who went into the darkest pit of the world to succour and find His lost sheep, is gliding into that room, and He turns your pleasure into a deadly horror with His glance. He has made you understand that a man has no right to any pleasure that is purchased by another’s wrong; nor to any gain that is purchased by another’s loss; nor to any wealth that is purchased by another’s poverty. “ Whatsoever ye would men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” And you cannot avoid that voice, because it is the Master Voice of the world, speaking the world’s master truth. If barbarities have ceased, if a social conscience has been created, if duty to humanity has been recognised, if you yourself, sitting in that gallery to-night, with a good coat on your back, are not a slave with the bloody lash cutting into your flesh, wielded by the hand of a brutal master, I

tell you it is because Christ has lived and died. All the justice that is in the world, all the compassion, all the mercy, has all come from the Man of Nazareth. You cannot avoid that Christ. You are living in Christ's America and in Christ's Brooklyn, and you are in the presence of Christ now.

And so I put one, only one, question to you as I close. The unavoidable Christ, why do you want to avoid Him? Are you ashamed of Him? Are you ashamed of being a Christian? Why, it seems to me that the very greatest thing a man can be in this world is to be a Christian. Dr. Hillis mentioned Henry Drummond to-night. I knew him; I loved him; I honoured him; but I never honoured and wondered at Drummond so much as in the close of his life. Here was a man, in the pink of manly health and strength, suddenly touched with a mysterious finger, dying month by month, slowly, terribly, in torture. During all that crucifixion Henry Drummond went through he never lost his temper, never lost his cheerfulness. He kept his good stories for his friends. They went to comfort him, he comforted them. I tell you there has been nothing on the battlefield, no heroism connected with war, so marvellous as the heroism you behold in the dying of Henry Drummond, and all that Drummond was he owed to Jesus Christ.

Is there any young man here to-night who, with that picture of Henry Drummond dying, through months of martyrdom, with a smile on his lips and love in his heart, does not covet to be such another as he? Why then do you want to avoid the Christ who can do all that to you? And have you no need of Christ? I think we all need some influence and some impulse outside ourselves to keep us up to our best ideals. One man finds an impulse in books; another in stimulating friendship; another in loyalty to some chivalrous ideal of life; but the greatest of all impulses that can uplift the life is the sense of comradeship of Jesus. Oh! think of what it means, to know that, as we walk about this world, there is One beside us whom we cannot see, but whom we know; whose eyes rest upon us, whose heart beats towards us, whose love is ours!

Young men, remember, not only that the eyes of Jesus are resting on you, but act so that those eyes may smile upon you; and if you can find me a better impulse to high things than that, I do not know it.

Or there may be some one here to-night who says, "All that you have been saying seems to me ironically inappropriate! Ironically inappropriate because you do not know the kind of dungeon I am in. No Christ can ever come through the shut doors of the place of shame



and misery, and hideous ruin, to which I have brought myself." My dear brother, my sister, that is not true. I have been in many dark places, but I have never been in a place so dark that I did not find Christ there. On the last day of the old year, a year ago, I went down to a house where there were some seventy fallen women, to take away three of their number to a new life, and, as I left that house, with those three poor creatures, the other inhabitants of the house lined up the passageway and prayed for them as they passed. They said things like this: "Be good. Oh! you have got such a chance! We wish we had it. Cannot you take us away too, sir, and give us a chance?" And the poor souls wished me "A Happy New Year" as I went out into the dark street. Was not Christ there? A dark place and the doors were shut, yet Christ was there. There is no place so dark but that Jesus can make it light; and so let me finish my sermon to-night by finishing my text: "Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you." Peace be unto you. When Jesus enters your life and mine, there is "the peace of God which passeth understanding."

## V

### THE COURAGE TO FORGET

*(Plymouth Church, Monday, November 14th.)*

**M**Y subject is "The Courage to Forget," and the passages on which I shall base my address are these: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John viii. 11). "This one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind" (Phil. iii. 13).

If you will allow these passages to make their proper appeal to the mind, you will at once recognise that there is something very startling in them. They speak of sin in a way to which we are not accustomed. They present us with two examples of sin which we rightly hold to be dreadful, one of which many moral men would account inexpiable. Christ is brought face to face with a life stained with a shame that seems indelible. Human law, and even the religious law of His race, demands the last penalty. Jesus inflicts no penalty. He is true to His own definition of His mission, that He has come not to destroy men's lives but to save them.

The thing He cares for is not the punishment of sin, but recovery and deliverance from sin. The woman is to have a new chance, because she is capable of a new chance. Her past and her present are not the chief facts about her; the chief fact is her future. It is her future of which Christ thinks, and therefore He says, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

The saying of St. Paul is conceived in the same spirit. He gives himself a chance: he deliberately turns his back upon the past, and fixes his mind upon the making of the future. He is fully aware of the horror of his past. He is a man stained with the blood of the martyrs. The death of Stephen is a crime that lies heavy on his conscience. There are men and women in the world whom he has wronged, and wronged irreparably. No perfection and purity of life which he may attain under the eyes of these Philippian converts can destroy the terrible facts of his earlier life, which live in the memories of those whom he unjustly persecuted in Judea. Nevertheless, he is resolved not to think of the past; he will forget it. He will treat it as though it were a book closed and sealed, nevermore to be re-opened. The questions that must instantly arise in our minds are these: Has a man a right to do this? Has he the power to do it? How are we to

define such a temper: is it immoral, or is it the expression of a new morality?

Let us first of all take account of certain facts about sin which we all admit.

The first fact is, as we have been told again and again, with all too bitter truth and insistence by many great teachers, that there is no forgiveness of sins in Nature. That which a man sows, he also reaps, and there is no magic which can change tares into wheat. Consequence pursues us to the last syllable of recorded time. It is no arbitrary law which declares that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation; it is a law written in our own members. We can as little escape it as we can escape the ineluctable force of gravitation. At this moment we each carry our ancestors in our blood, and deeds of pride and passion done a century ago have still a potency to subdue our will and shape our life. How, then, can we dissever ourselves from the past? Nature declares the act impossible.

A second fact is that in our own consciousness there is no past for sin. There may be a statute of limitations for social offences: there is none for memory. The deed of folly done in the early heat of youth is as fresh and vivid to us to-day as in the hour when we committed it. We have but to touch a secret spring in the

chamber of the mind, and our old offence steps forth to meet us, claiming indisputable rights in us. It was a striking and terrible fancy of De Quincey's that the books which will be opened at the day of judgment are simply the books of memory, on whose frail palimpsest are written in undying ink the thoughts and actions of a lifetime. The record which condemns us is kept by no recording angel; our own hand has written it, and it lies concealed and safe in the secret places of our own personality. How true the thought is we all have means of knowing; for who cannot at will unlock his past? Who has not again and again summoned himself to his own assize? Who has not known what it means for a curtain to be rolled up in the mind, and there, as upon a lighted stage, all the sad and sordid drama of the past has been re-enacted amid the wailing music of an infinite regret? How, then, can we forget the past? How can we talk of giving ourselves new chances when we are crushed beneath the weight of memory; or think of the Future, when to our own consciousness Time is non-existent, our life being one eternal Now?

Take the very cases put before you in these passages. What future has this woman apart from her disgraceful past? What can Paul do that will indeed dissociate him from the violence and evil that once made his name a name

of terror to the innocent and good? Give each not a mere handful of years, but centuries of life if you will or can: yet their life lies rooted in the past. The prodigal may come home, but he brings the far country with him. Men may learn to do well, but it will not annihilate the fact that they once did evil. This woman plucked from shame may walk henceforth in the beautiful ways of holiness; but the spectres of her past will be present with her in her dreams. All of which is true, but woe unto us if it be the whole truth. For consider what it implies; it shuts up the whole race in despair. It makes virtue impossible, except to those who, by some strange kindness of heredity and protected innocence, have escaped the evil of the world. And that were unjust. We deserve a new chance, because we are capable of a new chance. That is the ground which Christ takes, natural law notwithstanding. The kind of justice which would brand this woman for ever with the crime of a moment is not justice; a world governed thus would be a world of despair, a hell from which God Himself could devise no rescue. Therefore when Christ forgives this woman He is declaring a new morality, the morality of that new chance which every human creature deserves as long as he is capable of it. The forgiveness of sin is not an act of grace only, it is an act of justice: and so it



is plainly stated in that great saying of St. John, that if we confess our sins God is not only faithful but just in forgiving us our sins. Nature may be unjust to us; men may be unjust; we may be unjust to ourselves; but God will be just: and His justice displays itself in admitting the right of every human creature to a new chance as long as he is capable of using it.

Such a doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness comes as a welcome breath of hope to the broken heart of man; but for the very reason that we welcome it we should be at pains to understand it. It may be easily misunderstood, and is constantly misinterpreted as an indication of a sort of vague amiability in Christ. To the man who can read the Gospels without perceiving something more than amiability in Christ I have nothing to say. Christ did not dispense pardon wholesale, after the fashion of the weak person who feels no resentment of wrong, and forgives wrong to escape the pain of punishing it. He gave a chance to those capable of a chance—to no others. We have therefore to ask another question: What sort of sinner is he who is capable of a chance? Let me try to answer that question by drawing a distinction between what I may call *irresolute* and *resolute* sin.

There is a kind of sin in which irresolution is so deeply mixed that it is incapable of a new chance. "Acts may be forgiven, but even God Himself cannot forgive the hanger-back," is a saying as true as it is brilliant. It is the irresolute act, either of good or evil, that does the worst damage to the moral nature. Thus, in speaking of Robert Burns, Stevenson declares that it was this element of irresolution in the man that made his case hopeless. "If he had been strong enough to refrain, or bad enough to persevere in evil; if he had only not been Don Juan at all, or been Don Juan altogether, there had been some possible road for him throughout this troublesome world; but a man, alas! who is equally at the call of his worse and best instincts, stands amid changing events without foundation or resource." It is in the same spirit that he speaks of Burns as grovelling in "unmanly penitence" before God at the first touch of sickness, and says that there are no tears so little worthy of respect as the tears of drunkenness. Try to grasp what is meant by these significant words, for they go to the root of the pathology of sin. They describe the man whose sin is not manly, and whose penitence is not manly either; to whom you cannot say, "Go, sin no more," for the advice will be in vain. Forgiven, he will abuse forgiveness by new downfall, and treated with all the grace of

pity, he will misuse grace so that his sin the more abounds. His sin is not a clean wound, but a disease. It is not some barbarous mis-handling in a lost battle, it is a rottenness of the bones. It is not the gust of passion which takes a Peter off his feet, but the slow, deliberate sinking of a Judas Iscariot into the mire of dissimulation. To such a sinner God offers the chance in vain; he cannot profit by it.

On the other hand, there is a kind of sin which may be called *Resolute*. Folly, pride, perversity, may all be present in it, but there is no hanging back. The nature of such a man is of that order "which moveth altogether, if it move at all." A Judas calculates his advantage to the last; a Peter flings his whole life upon the hazard. Saul of Tarsus may take a wrong course, but he takes it in a great way, with a kind of misguided heroism. Or to take more modern illustrations, a youth of strong passions flings his life away as the prodigal son did, overwhelmed for a time by the unleashed turbulence of his own nature. But at all events he is resolute in his follies. What is the saving factor in such a youth? It is this very manliness of nature. He sins like a man, not like a sneak. He takes the punishment that falls to him and does not cry out against it. He sins like a man; he repents also like a man, not complaining of his hunger but of his unworthiness;

“ I am not worthy to be called thy son.” And that is the case of the clean wound, not of the disease. It will heal, because the nature is still healthy. For him there is another chance because he is capable of it. To him Christ may say, “ Go, and sin no more,” for as he has sinned with his strength so he will cleave to righteousness with his strength too. And for him it is but a just thing that he should get his chance; and precisely because he is capable of learning the lessons of the past, he may be encouraged to forget the past, and find that

“ The strongest plume in wisdom’s pinion  
Is the memory of past folly.”

That brings us to the most difficult matter in the whole problem. We feel it is just that we should have a new chance; but the question remains, how are we to regard past sin? The answer is that we should forget it, a truly astonishing answer. It might easily be interpreted as implying mere callousness. Men are only too ready to forget their sins, and to assume that all the consequences of these sins are annihilated by lapse of time, or by the act of penitence. We must take the risk of such an inference. The thing to be remembered is, that this is Christ’s answer, and for those who can accept it in the spirit in which Christ utters it, it is the very essence of all His Gospel. The

misapplication of a medicine does not destroy the essential value of the medicine. The greatest truths are always the truths that lie nearest to error. There is no more dangerous doctrine than the grace of God, as Paul knew very well, when he said that some men sinned that grace might abound; but he, nevertheless, preached that doctrine as the one message for humanity. There could be no more dangerous thing from the point of view of social law than for Christ to let this woman pass out of sight unpunished; yet Christ did it, because He wished to vindicate the higher spiritual law of the new chance. Can we vindicate this doctrine of forgetting the past? Dare I take the risk involved in such a truth, and say boldly to the man who comes to me with some terrible confession of misconduct, "This is God's will concerning you, that you should regard the past as a closed book, and go and sin no more"? I cannot help myself: I must take that risk, I must give this counsel, not only because it is Christ's counsel, but because I feel in my own heart that it is the only manly way of regarding past sin.

How can I justify the counsel, then? I justify it as a counsel of moral sanity. It is not good for us to brood over our past sin; we know to what a prison-house of despair and madness such brooding led so gentle and so

pure a spirit as Cowper's. To think much of disease is to produce disease. The remorse that is for ever reliving the past is an unclean passion. Nothing is so morally debilitating as the habit of calling up before the imagination the lurid phantoms of old sins. This is the worst evil of auricular confession; it sets men and women searching for sin, prying into the secrecies of sin, vivisectioning the diseased moral tissue, and the result is the sapping of character, the diminution of strength to resist evil, the pollution of the imagination. Therefore it is simply a counsel of moral sanity to say, Cut yourself free, as far as you may, from the very memory of sin. When the curtain lifts in the brain, and the old drama begins to move again, avert your eyes, turn the lights out. "Never allow your mind to dwell on your own misconduct. The conscience has morbid sensibilities; it must be employed, but not indulged." The thing that the sick man has to do is to get back to health as soon as he can; and the quickest way is to forget that he has been sick. And so that same wise counsellor, Robert Louis Stevenson, whom I have already quoted, says in one of his prayers, "Help us with the grace of courage, that we be none of us cast down when we sit lamenting amid the ruins of our happiness or our integrity; touch us with the fire of Thy altar, that we may be up and doing to rebuild



our city.” The grace of courage—in nothing do we need it so much as in our attitude to past sin, for the courage to forget our sins is the essential preliminary to the yet more difficult courage of atoning for them.

It is not only a counsel of moral sanity thus to forget, but it is an act of faith. We are told that God forgets; that He casts our sins behind His back, to be remembered no more against us for ever; and it is an act of unfaith to go on remembering what God has forgotten. Forgiveness, if it mean anything at all, must be final and complete. The forgiven man is put back by the act of forgiveness into the place he occupied before he sinned. Morally that is impossible, spiritually it is possible. My child would think ill of me, and know my forgiveness but a form of words, if I kept a clouded countenance toward him after I forgave him. I turn to him a bright, encouraging countenance, and thus I encourage him to imagine himself as standing where he stood before he sinned. God does the same by us. Christ says plainly, “Neither do I condemn thee.” When He meets Peter once more after his great apostasy, He never so much as names it; He treats it as forgotten, in order that Peter may forget it. The man who goes on confessing sin which he believes is forgiven is insulting the sincerity of God in every word he utters, and under the in-

fluence of a false humility is simply gratifying a morbid sensitiveness of soul. Surely the manlier and better way is to accept forgiveness with no false scruples; and there is no better way of showing our faith in God than to have the courage to forget the sin which He forgives.

And the courage of forgetfulness is not only an act of faith, it is the one source of moral progress. We must be perpetually cutting ourselves free from the past, if we are to push on to a larger and better future. The artist forgets his early failures, the author his first grotesque experiments in literature, and the saint his first stumbling steps, for the same reason, a reason which is imperative, that no progress is possible to a mind clogged by the weight of past errors. And herein lies the final justification of Christ's doctrine: we are allowed to forget only on condition that we aspire. Paul forgets the past only because, and as long as, he is pressing to the mark of his high calling in Christ Jesus. The sinful woman is not condemned because she sins no more. The one anodyne of past sin is the constant exertion of the soul intent upon the struggle of virtue. Relax that struggle, and all the past will rush back upon you like a desolating blackness. Consecrate yourself to that struggle, and God will permit you to forget the

past; nay, in the very act of struggling you will forget it.

Perhaps some of you will say: "But what about the secret and unpublished sins, which are all the more dreadful to remember, because they have not been openly punished?" You must let God deal with these in His own way; if He choose to keep your sin secret, let His tender grace to you be a new incentive to a pure and humble life. Or you will say: "What of the kind of sin that has wronged another more than myself?" There is but one answer to that question: go to the wronged one, and make what atonement you can. You can never make a full reparation: make what you can. Something here also you must leave to God, for if you could deal with your misconduct without God's help, Christ had not come into the world to die for you. The main thing, the one thing, I implore you to recollect is, that there is pardon for you, even you, if you are capable of taking it. Christ is not here to condemn you—your conscience has done that already—He is here to save you. Too long you have fed upon the husks; come home. Too long you have lashed yourself with vain remorse. Arise, and go to your Father. Let the dead past bury its dead; come to the Redeemer of your spirit, and him that cometh, He will in nowise cast out. God has faith in you; and let God's faith in you be-

get in you what you need quite as much as penitence, if you are to use your new chance, faith in yourself.

“But,” you say, “thus to turn from sin needs an impulse. What can give me an impulse to turn away from sin?” Have any of you read the sonnet that Rossetti wrote on “The woman who was a sinner at the door of Simon the Pharisee”? Or have you seen the picture he painted? Here is the picture: a woman passing through the street in all the gaiety, the untroubled and false gaiety, of a beautiful courtesan, and she looks and sees at a window the face of Jesus. And the moment she sees the face of Jesus her life is scorched into nothingness. Her soul cries out within her in agony, and in the words of the poem she exclaims—

“O, loose me, seest thou not my Bridegroom’s face  
That draws me to Him? For His feet, my kiss,  
My hair, my tears He craves to-day:—and oh!  
What words can tell what other day and place  
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?  
He needs me—calls me—loves me—let me go!”

There was the impulse: she had seen Christ; and the moment she saw the Master she wanted to forget the past.

“There is life for a look at the crucified One—  
There is life at this moment for thee.”

And so, lastly, the great source of impulse

for you to turn from your sin, my brother, is that God has faith in you; and God's faith in you should beget a little faith in yourself. There is nothing that heals us so speedily of our self-despising as the sense that some one has faith in us. Oh, think of it and look at it! This woman, in her shame, had not a friend in the world, not one who believed in her: and yet Jesus had faith in her. Jesus says to her, believing in her capacity of complete recovery, "Go, and sin no more." And if Jesus, looking at that creature humbled in the dust, could believe it was possible for her to sin no more, she herself might surely begin to have faith in herself.

God's faith in you, Christ's love toward you, Christ even now saying to the men and women here most conscious of sin: "You can be clean; you may be clean; you can even now begin a new life; let Me come into your life to help you"—that is the gospel. Will you receive it?

## VI

### THE MINISTRY OF NIGHT

*(Tuesday Evening, November 15, 1904.)*

THE subject on which I wish to speak to you to-night I have called "The Ministry of Night." The text is found in John iii. 2 and 3: "The same came to Jesus by night (that is, Nicodemus), and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Three times Nicodemus is mentioned in the Gospel story. Each time the fact is mentioned that he came to Jesus by night. Three times he emerges into history: first as an inquirer after truth, again as a witness, and lastly as a disciple of Jesus Christ. On each occasion the phrase is repeated: "He who came to Jesus by night." Why is it that this peculiar stress is laid upon the fact that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night? I think it is because John would lay emphasis upon the fact that Nico-



demus had a mind that was dark with perplexity and difficulty on the great problems of the soul and of religion. He came by night because there was something in the dark obscurity of the night which answered to the condition of his own soul. With some of us it is only when the night of some great perplexity or grief closes around us with sombre shadows; only when the immense loneliness of the night presses and forces itself down upon us that we begin to get face to face with the mystery of the soul. It was so with Nicodemus. He had come to feel the dissatisfaction and the loneliness of a soul that finds the mystery everywhere present in life too great for it. He came to Jesus by night, and the night was in his own soul.

But why did he come to *Jesus* about his difficulties? Because he had watched Jesus, he had heard His words, and he had perceived that there was a secret about Christ that he desired to understand. I remember on a certain day, some months ago, two things happened. I read in a newspaper a little story about one of the most famous and brilliant actresses of Europe, who, when she was congratulated upon her wealth and fame, said: "All that is nothing to me; what I want is rest." And later in the day I sat by the bedside of a poor dying seamstress, a worn-out child who had toiled with her needle to keep her mother's home together, and she

said: "I have rest; I am quite happy." And I thought if I could only bring these two women together, the brilliant actress to the bedside of the poor seamstress, would not the brilliant actress have said: "Here is that which I have long sought in vain. It is worth all my fame, all my wealth. Tell me the secret?"

My friends, there is a secret in the world, the sublimest of all secrets, which we call the secret of Jesus. Rome perceived it long ago. It was not the doctrines of Christianity that conquered Rome: it was not preaching and teaching from house to house that stirred the echoes of the city and aroused the interest of the people. Preaching there was, but there was something more. There grew up in the great pagan city a new kind of men and women with calm upon their brows and tranquillity in their eyes; and Rome, tired out with pleasure and lust, said: "These people have a secret; what is it? We want to know it." And through the ages that secret has never left the world. Twelve centuries later there arose a man called Francis of Assisi, humble and poor, but whose face shone with the peace of God. The greatest intellects of Europe sought the door of Francis to know what the secret was, and where the peace came from. That was what Nicodemus did. Here was one who went up and down the world with the tranquillity of God, clothing

Him like a garment. And Nicodemus, walking in the darkness of his great perplexity, said: "Can He tell me what the secret is? I also want it." That was why he came to Jesus by night.

The first thing I wish you to notice, then, is that this is not an old and obsolete story; it is a new and living story, because it is a representative story. It represents two things common to mankind in all ages: the desire to discover the best kind of life and dissatisfaction with any kind of life that is not the best. I do not mean to say that this dissatisfaction is constant, normal, and intense. It is not in the power of human nature to sustain itself continuously at the straining point of agony and great and painful feeling. We have opiates for our pain, we have our love for those who are dependent upon us, we have our pride and our pleasure, we have the absorbing struggles of our life, we have our ambitions and books and music, but they are only opiates. The pain is there still, a hungry, gnawing pain, which wakes ever and again into violence, a worm that coils around the heart and feeds upon it, and from time to time we feel the cruel tooth. The man to whom life has given the most and best sometimes has a moment when he feels as though he is feeding upon ashes. The man who builds himself the finest house has a moment when he looks upon it

with cold and indifferent eyes, for it has ceased to charm him. The man who has climbed highest in the social scale has a moment when he says: "Is it worth while?" He knows something is wanting. He gets glimpses of another and higher kind of life which is not his. He meets people, it may be much poorer, and much less successful than himself, and yet they seem to spread peace, purification, and perfume about them as they go. He says: "Oh, that I could be like these! Here is a better kind of life, and I have not lived it." My friends, are these things true of us? Have we had these moments? Nicodemus had had them, and, experienced ruler and teacher as he was, *he* knew that he had not found the true secret of the best kind of life. There are many men who call themselves Christians of whom that can be said. There are those of us who call ourselves good, and are believed to be good, and yet we have not found the ultimate secret of the perfect peace that is in Jesus. If we are honest with ourselves we know there is something lacking. Here is a ruler and a teacher in Israel, a great, wise, and good man, and he says: "I have not got what I want," and he went to Jesus by night.

Here is the next thing I want you to notice: Nicodemus did something—he went to Jesus. He did something positive; he did something

that cost him much. Do you think it was an easy thing for this proud and cultured man, who all his life had taught other people, to go to Jesus of Nazareth to be taught? Oh, I think I see him on his way to Jesus that night, taking the quietest and the darkest road lest he should be seen; by turns hot and cold as he thinks about his position; at one moment burning with eagerness and the next moment ashamed of his errand. There he goes, down the dark road, hoping that no fellow-Pharisee is abroad to scrutinise or question him. It was no easy thing for a man of his habits of mind and social position to seek Jesus: it cost him something. Be sure of this, then, it always costs us something to come to Jesus. It is not an easy thing. And in spite of all the reverence and authority that clothe the Christian tradition to-day it is still difficult to come to Jesus. What can Jesus teach one who is a ruler in Israel? Think of all that stands in the way of Nicodemus: his pride of culture, his social reputation, the deadening weight of convention, those notions about religion which have become second nature to him, and his natural dislike of anything like extravagance or enthusiasm. It needed boldness for such a man to take the path that led to the Galilean that night. But where there is a real misery men will be bold in seeking relief from misery. The man whose heart is really

aching for peace and rest will not stop to think about what others think of him. And he must *do* something. To feel, to hope, to wish, that will not help him. It is action that saves us, and so Nicodemus, laying aside every weight, every conventionality, takes the dark road to the door of the humble Galilean, and his spirit, as he goes, says: "What must I do to be saved?" He came to Jesus.

If you are at all interested in any of these feelings I have described, I think your whole soul and mind will now be straining to know what it was that Jesus had to say to Nicodemus. Within the little room there stands the old, wise ruler and scholar, face to face with the young, unauthorised teacher. Nicodemus can hear his own heart beat as he enters that humble room. His quiet, well-ordered life has never known an adventure like this. He is tempted even now to turn back. It seems such folly to suppose that this young, unlettered Galilean can teach him anything. He feels very much as the wise and philosophic people of Siena felt when they went to hear Catherine preach. How should the daughter of a poor tanner have anything to say to them? He felt as the great people of the court and the aristocracy felt when they went to hear Whitfield preach. How should a poor Oxford sizar have anything to say to them? He felt as some of you feel perhaps—proud,



curious, coldly critical as you entered this service to-night. What did he expect Christ to say to him? I suppose that he expected some philosophic discourse or something novel in theology. Religion was for this man, remember, in the main a matter of intellectual curiosity, and the most that he expected was some new putting of an old truth. The first word Jesus speaks is to make him understand that religion is not a part of a life, religion is the whole of life. To understand it, to receive it, to find its divine secret, it is not enough that you should open this or that door of your mind or your judgment. Your whole mind and heart and will have to be created over again. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." That is Christ's word. It is a bigger thing than Nicodemus imagined to be a Christian. It means the re-fusing of a man's entire nature, so that it may be said that he is born again, and is a new creature. And when Nicodemus heard that, he marvelled and said: "How can these things be?"

Why did Nicodemus marvel? He gives his reason quite plainly. He says that such a process is against the laws of nature. "How can a man be born again when he is old?" In other words, how can a man's nature be changed? Think of it. Here are you, a complex and recognisable creature, who for ten,

twenty, thirty, forty years have lived in this world, daily building up for yourself, by hundreds of infinitesimal acts, a personality. There was a time when you were plastic and impressionable. There was a time when, chameleon-like, you took your colour from your environment. That time has passed long ago; your habits and principles are fixed; your views of life, your way of looking at things, your very speech and manner are fixed. Your friends, and those who know you best, know these definite characteristics of your personality. They know that beneath the outward suavity of manners there is impenetrable habit, just as under the soft loam there sometimes runs a ridge of rock that will turn the edge of the sharpest weapon, and you are accustomed by this time to justify yourself upon these grounds. You say: "I am what I am, and I cannot help it; my habits are fixed, my thoughts are fixed, my personality is no longer plastic. How can a man be born again when he is old?"

Let me translate this statement into spiritual language. Here is a story I remember reading many years ago in the notebook of one of our novelists. It runs in this way: the story is about a man who was held fast in the grip of drunkenness, but by power of will broke his vice and for twenty years kept from the drink, and then, when his wife died and the world

seemed empty to him, he did not think the struggle worth keeping up and sank back again "and," says the writer who tells the story, "nature, whether human or otherwise, was not made to be reformed. You can develop, you can check, you cannot alter it." Why, even Luther, in one of his despondent moments, said: "You must take men as they are; you cannot change their natures." And, as I said last night, if that be true, there is no hope for any one of us. There advances toward us out of the terrible shadows that gather around the closing of our life the awful spectres who say to us: "Despair and die." Is it true? Christ says it is not true. He came "to seek and to save the lost"; He came to change the very natures which seem to be unchangeable. "You must be born again," says Christ. You must *because you can*. Yea, though a man be old, old in habits, old in sin, he can be born again. That is the answer Christ gives to Nicodemus, and He says: "Marvel not," and then proceeds to put three points to His astonished listener.

First of all, to the question of Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" Christ replies thus: It is an intelligible process, and therefore it should be clear and acceptable to an intelligent man. "Art thou a ruler in Israel and hast never seen anything that answers to a new birth?" What Christ referred to, I think, was

this: there were in Jerusalem pagans who from time to time became converts to the Jewish faith. Picture the pagan as he comes to Jerusalem, knowing only a barbarous faith. Gradually the old mythologies, on which his mind has been nurtured, become unthinkable. There expands before him, like a fan of light, the truth about God taught by Moses and the prophets. After many ceremonies he becomes a convert to Judaism and is admitted to the full privileges of the Jewish faith. Jesus says to Nicodemus: "Have you seen that, and yet when the new birth is spoken of are you incredulous?"

If Jesus were speaking to us to-night He might make His appeal on the same grounds. He might ask us if we have never seen changes in men so vital and so far-reaching that they might be called new births? Are not men truly born again in intellect by the reception of new truths, and in spirit by the entrance of a great love, and in conduct by the perception of new ideals? There is no reason for incredulity—it is God's way with man, and has always been so. It is an intelligible process, and therefore should not be ridiculed by any person of intelligence. "Marvel not," says Christ.

And then Christ puts a second point. He says, in the second place, not only "you can" but "you must" be born again. Note the words. Christ says plainly that without re-

birth you cannot even *see* the kingdom of God. You remember the story about Turner—how some one said: “ Mr. Turner, I never saw such sunsets as you paint,” and he replied: “ Don’t you wish you could see them? ” What he meant is quite clear. It is that there is a sight of the soul as well as a vision of the eye, and it requires more than the physical eye to see the glory Turner saw in evening skies. There is also needed in us a power of spiritual vision if we are to see Christ. As you came to this church to-night and looked up as you drew near, what did you see? Just a mass of looming walls, and a light here and there; and if you had stayed outside, how much would you have known of what the church is? Would you have guessed anything about the waves of feeling ebbing and flowing and beating from wall to wall? Would you have guessed anything about the sacred and accumulated memories which to me seem to be real and vital forces at this moment? Would you have known anything about the sacred songs and prayer? You must come inside the church to see what the church is. And Jesus says: “ I am the door. If any man will enter in, he shall be saved.” No wonder you say to Christian people: “ I cannot see what you see.” It is because the soul has not been recreated. You will never see the sunset on the Cross where your Maker died, nor the

sunrise on the sepulchre whence He rose for your justification, till you get the new Divine sense created in you by which these things are seen. You must be born again. You cannot even *see* the kingdom of God until you are born again.

And then Christ puts the third point, which is the most difficult. He says: "This is a spiritual process." There I can fancy some of you parting company with me at once. You follow me when I speak of the intellectual possibilities of new birth, but now, when I come to the spiritual process, you say, "Here you use terms which I reject. I know nothing about spiritual processes." Give me one moment's tolerance—let me tell you, what I mean by a spiritual process. I call that process spiritual which lies behind matter, and is not explained by matter. Here is a man who the other day was overtaken with a great and awful terror thinking of a friend he had not thought of for twenty years, and he could not explain it. At that very moment that friend was being tortured to death by cannibals. You believe there is such a thing as telepathy. You believe that some strange wave of sympathy, or personality, travelled over the world, vibrating between the hearts of these two separated friends. You say: "That is intelligible. I have heard things like that myself." Yet you won't believe that



in your own heart, and in all human hearts, God has fashioned an apparatus to receive the message of His love and His power. Listen to the words of Jesus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it comes or whither it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." Out of the far eternities God comes to you like a wind; God's mystic telepathy reaches you; and you have felt this, and some of you feel it now. "Marvel not that ye must be born again."

"Ah!" you say, "but these are theories; we have heard them before. Can you give us instances? Can you give us practical proofs?" Why, the world is full of them. Look at that man bowing on Pilate's staircase at Rome and behold him tremble with a sudden joy, as though an angel spake: "The just shall live by faith"—and Martin Luther gets up, and the Reformation was begun! Was not that new birth? Look at that poor unhappy wanderer with a sad, broken heart going up and down through the wet Elstowe meadows, dreaming of hell, frightened in every fibre of him and horrified at the vision of his sin; and then, one day he hears two old women, sitting in the sun, talking of the love of Christ, and the great heart of John Bunyan opens into a miraculous flower of faith and poetry! Is not that new birth?

Have you any better phrase for it? "Can a man be born again when he is old?" Look at John Wesley. At forty years of age he is hardened into a hide-bound formalist. Our ways after forty years are tolerably fixed, and yet the hour comes when this precise and narrow ritualist bows in the meeting-house, on the site of which I have often preached, and while a simple Moravian speaks of the love of God the heart of Wesley melts, and he says: "I believe that God did for Christ's sake forgive my sins, even mine." Was not that a new birth? Or, take a more recent story. You remember what Stanley, the great traveller, said about himself. In substance he said that when he went to Africa to find Livingstone, he was the biggest atheist in London. He found Livingstone, and behind Livingstone he found Christ. For he said that as he stood day by day beside Livingstone in the Dark Continent and saw the simplicity of the man, the love of the man, and how he lived up to the things he professed, he asked himself, "Is he crazy? what's the matter with him?" Until finally, through Livingstone, something of Christ came into the heart of Stanley, and he says: "Livingstone converted me, but he never meant to." A few months ago this man, who once described himself as "the biggest atheist in London," dies, saying to his broken-hearted wife: "Do not

weep; we shall meet again." That from the man who was "the biggest atheist in London"! Is not that new birth? Have you any better phrase for it than the one that Christ has given?

And now, think of what it means to be "born again." It means getting back to your childhood. Who has not cried, "Oh, that I were a child again! If only I could start life over again, free from all the errors and disasters, free from all the stains and soils of the past!" You may, you can. You can get back to childhood again. For Naaman there was the river that washed away the leprosy of the flesh; for you "there is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness," where the soul may be washed clean. To get back to childhood, to get the weight of sin removed, to start anew—Jesus says you can. Science tells us that all that is wanted to create a new star is a start. There is the vast floating nebulæ. If it will only cohere at some little point, then the globe will begin to form, and presently you will have a star. All that you want is the point of contact, the cohering point; then the new life will begin to stir in you, and the new soul begin to grow into the starry image of Christ.

And now, may Christ Himself teach you and me what these things mean, for no one knows better than I do how difficult it is to speak of

them, and no one here can tell me so plainly as I shall tell myself when I leave this pulpit to-night, how badly and imperfectly I have spoken of them. But my hope is that Jesus is now going to finish the sermon, for He had a wonderful way of making people understand what the new birth meant without even mentioning it. The young ruler did not understand anything about the new birth until Jesus said: "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor." He understood then that there was something that he had not got. And the woman of Samaria did not understand anything about it until Jesus said: "Go, fetch thy husband." Then she knew. And Simon Peter did not know what spirit he was of until Jesus looked on him, and then his heart melted within him. And so it may be that there is here to-night a young ruler, a graduate of a university, full of good feelings, but you want something you have not got. "You must be born again." Or there may be a woman here who knows not how great her sin is because she is used to it. "You must be born again." Or there may be a man whose life is a ghastly tragedy, for whom some single act of evil seems to mark the grave of hope and effort, and Christ says: "You may be born again." And His promise is that, as many as receive Him, to them shall He give power to become the sons of God, even to those

who believe on His name, which are born, not of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

*You can—you must—you may.*

And you may refuse. Nicodemus came by night—and through the night he found his way to Christ. There was another man of whom it was said, “He went out immediately, and it was night.” Are you going *through* the night to Jesus—or *into* the night with Judas? The dawn met the eyes of Nicodemus as that interview with Christ concluded. But to Judas there was no dawn—for in going from Christ he left all light behind him.

*Through* the night to Jesus—*into* the night with your own tortured and tormented self—ah, which? For it is always dark where Christ is not—it is always daybreak in the soul when Jesus enters it.

## VII

### GOD WAITING MAN'S ANSWER

*(Plymouth Church, Wednesday, November 16th.)*

**T**O-NIGHT my subject is "God Waiting Man's Answer," and the passage upon which my address is based is found in 2 Sam. xxiv. 13: "Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me." It is so that the prophet speaks evermore to the souls of men. The prophet is the bearer of messages from the Eternal, messages which demand an answer. The prophet is not necessarily a human creature speaking with the human voice. The prophet is sometimes represented by a moment, by some solemn hour of life when the soul is stirred beyond its wont and the vision of things eternal is unrolled. Or the prophet may be represented by an emotion—some call to the heart, some clear voice that speaks within us, rebuking us for our folly, speaking, it may be, through the lips of our pain and the anguish of our regret, a very soul-piercing voice which, waking or sleeping, we cannot escape. Or the prophet may be represented for us by a cause, some struggle for



righteousness, in which we are called to take our part, some great divisive truth which parts men on the right hand and the left, demanding from us allegiance or refusal. Or the prophet may be life itself, a vague and awful figure rising out of the wrecks of time, a ghost treading amidst the dust of empire, mocking us with the folly of our ambitions and with the brevity of all human joys and triumphs and successes. But the prophet, in whatever guise he may come, is always with us. No man goes through life without hearing the prophetic voice. Out of eternity God leans toward us, speaking to us through various events and through various men. The holy messages of truth and righteousness pursue us, find us out, assail and importune us, and to those messages we have to give a reply: "Advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me."

Think, then, first of all, what this statement really implies. It implies this: that man is the centre of a great web and network of Divine influence. Spiritual forces play upon him, moulding and communicating with him. There are two aspects in which we see man. We see him as a creature of time, content with his lot, and we see him, on the other hand, as a child of eternity imprisoned in time. Which of these two descriptions of man is the true description? I think if we reflect for a moment we shall all

of us see that the second description is the true one. Human life rests upon a spiritual base. Man is universally conscious of some Divine power interested in his little life, touching it at various points, interfering with it, agitating it; and this sense of God, sometimes a vague dread, sometimes a living rapture, throbs through every fibre of human nature. It is the root of all religions. There is something in man which prevents us from accepting human life in mere animal contentment, and when we do so we know we are committing an outrage upon ourselves. You may say that these sentiments are not sentiments that have always existed in the world. Some one here may remind me of all that has been written about the old Greeks and their joy in the common day and their freedom from those sombre shadows of destiny that overcloud the modern world. One of our essayists has even gone so far as to say that when the old Greeks chose, instead of the sun-girt Apollo, the crucified Nazarene, they made a mistake which was fatal to the happiness of Europe. An irresponsible essayist may say that, and a writer of fiction may say that, but your truly cultured thinker will not say it. Your own Professor James, in his Gifford Lectures, has said something quite different. He has pointed out that what was called the joyousness of the Greek and his contentment

with the common day only existed by his faculty of forgetting the mystery of life and death. And Dean Stanley has somewhere pointed out that he cannot recollect in Greek poetry the emblem of the setting sun. The Greek turned his face deliberately away from all that savoured of the sombre and the sad, and yet the shadow came and eternity cast its pure white light, its searching beam, its alarming splendour, down into the depths of the Greek heart, as it does into the depths of every heart.

My brethren, let us take this fact that life rests upon a spiritual base for granted before anything else is said to-night. The true definition of man I offer you is this: man is "an animal by accident, but a spirit by birthright"; and hence we know that there are such things as the messages of God; and hence we are aware, not always clearly, sometimes with great vagueness, sometimes with long interruptions—yet we are aware in the intense moments of our life that round about us there is a great spiritual world pulsating. We are watched, we are known, we are waited for in a world that is out of sight.

This story from which my text is taken serves to point the lesson. Let us look at it for a moment. Here is a king of a small people, one of the smallest and most insignificant kingdoms in the world, who commits a certain sin in

numbering the people. It is an act which most men would not reckon a sin at all. It appears to be nothing worse than an error of judgment or a blunder in political policy. In the history of the ages it is an infinitesimal event. The great kingdoms of the world were not affected by it. It is no crime that shakes the stars, no blind brutality that stains the earth with blood; it is no atrocity which seems worthy of all those magnificent and fearful retributions which happen to men and nations when the cup of their iniquity is full. Yet what happens? God instantly interferes. The prophet is knocking at the door of David in the very moment when his sin completes itself. He has touched God's judgment-seat unawares; he has set in motion spiritual forces which instantly declare themselves. And, my brethren, it is true about ourselves as well as about David, and it is true about our least sin. Ah, there are many of you who are ready to console yourselves in your sinning upon the ground of your own insignificance. You say: "Is it credible that God should take any account of the small matters of my life, the petty wrongs I may commit, the evil thought that may pass through my mind? It is beneath the dignity of God to care about me and about such things as these." But God does care, because you are His child, and God does know.

Therefore this text is for us. The prophet found the door of the king; he will find your door too, however hidden or humble or obscure it is. There he knocks and makes his stern demand, "Advise now what answer I shall return to him who sent me."

What, then, is the nature of this message? Who are these prophets that come to all of us, knocking at the chamber-door and demanding a reply? The first prophet is life itself—life with eyes that see all mysteries, whose robe is time, whose feet are silent with the dust of many graves. Shortly before Shelley died he had a curious dream, in which he saw his spectral self coming toward his conscious self, and the spectral self suddenly lifted the hood from the brow and spake to the conscious self, saying: "Art thou satisfied? Art thou satisfied?" That vision comes to us all, the cowed figure of our own life. It comes holding in its hands the long diary of our existence. It turns the pages back to the chapter of childhood and says, "Look," and as we look how many of us have to say—

"It gives me little joy  
To know I'm farther off from heaven  
Than when I was a boy."

It turns back the pages of youth, written with many an episode of pride and folly. It turns back the pages of manhood, stained with many

a story of corrupt pleasures and sordid joys. It turns back the page of the older years, in which nothing is written, it may be, but the ledger account of your business gains and losses, and it says: "Are you satisfied?" And, oh, there are pages that are blank, and they also are terrible—page after page with nothing written, as though we had not lived, as though our heart were dead, as though we slept while the great battle of truth and righteousness and progress and knowledge went on around us, and as we read in the book we begin to see that it tells a story. It records a drama. It is not a collection of disconnected fragments. Cause and effect are here, act and consequence. We begin to see the links and sequences in the long chain of action. We see how character has been forged, how habits have been riveted upon us, how the yesterdays are the parents of to-day. We see how some pollution of the soul, which dates back, it may be, to the schoolday time, has left a stain which has spread itself through our whole nature. We see how pride has misled us and how pleasure has corrupted us; how we have disappointed our own dreams of excellence; how we have missed the shining stepping-stones and upward mounting stairs that led to God, and a voice speaks: "Art thou satisfied?" And then we begin to see, if we have grace given to us to see it, that this busi-



ness of living is a tremendous business. Oh! it is an awful thing to live. It is no

“ Life of nothings, nothing worth  
From that first nothing ere our birth  
To that last nothing under earth.”

We are fashioning a destiny. To have lived carelessly were a crime; to live wickedly is insanity. Once, once only, it is given to us to live upon this earth, and oh, awful thought! from these earthly days of ours, from these careless acts, we are building up an illimitable future. Life knocks at your door and asks: “ Art thou satisfied? ” What answer do you give the prophet?

It seems to me that one of the greatest perils of this generation is its almost total lack of meditation. “ My people do not consider,” said the old Hebrew prophet. There are many men who do not know themselves, and resolutely take every opportunity they can to forbid self-knowledge. A young doctor, in speaking to me once of the days of his early practice, when, by a very slight modification of principle and honour, he might have easily made a rapid position for himself but did not, said: “ You see, sir, I could not do it; I had to live with myself.” That was a fine answer. Here was a man who knew what self-scrutiny was. Here was a man who looked forward and measured

what the future meant, and he could not live with a dishonoured self. But with many men to-day there is no onward-looking thought. They do not use those means of thought which lie in the very nature of our common life. They are counted of no value. And hence, just because you do not sit down and think about yourself, you know not what kind of man you are, and there comes a miscalculation which runs through all your life and is going to work its ruin.

We have all read the parable of Jesus in which He tells us of the man who had many barns and built greater, and said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry." The proper title for that parable is, "The Story of the Man who Miscalculated." The most wonderful thing in the story is its entire sobriety of statement, its convincing lucidity, its plain justice. The man is not a bad man. There is no suggestion that he made his money by dishonest or dishonourable means. He is a good man, according to the common ethics of things. What is wrong, then? Simply that he is making the fatal experiment of living without a soul. That is the awful accusation Christ brings against him; and it is an accusation which comes home with marked emphasis against multitudes of men in this age of ours.

Will you consider a moment and tell me whether this city—every city—is not full of men and women who are making the fatal experiment of living without a soul? If I take the matter into the area of national events you will at once recognise what the statement means. When your great emancipation declaration was published, what was it that James Russell Lowell wrote?—

“For it was felt from pole to pole,  
Without a need o’ proclamation;  
Earth’s biggest country’s got her soul  
And risen up Earth’s Greatest Nation.”

And what did he mean? He meant that the country had done and dared something for righteousness. It had sacrificed for a cause. It had put the crown of fire upon its own brow and driven the spear of crucifixion into its own side rather than let the ease of falsehood and corruption destroy the people. The nation got its soul by sacrificing its barns. America is not going to live without a soul. You are not going to do or be anything in the world, either as a nation or individually, without a soul. You miscalculate if you suppose you can. For the hour comes when that Prophet of Retribution, whose face is darkness and whose lips are doom, will come to you in your false prosperity and say: “This night thy soul shall be required

of thee. Where is the soul for which Christ died? ”

My brethren, I beg you, first of all, to face boldly the question with which I started—“ Are you satisfied with your own life? ” And you must take account, in answering that question, not only of the things done but of the things undone. Think of what a human life may be and measure its splendour by the splendour of others who have lived well. Oh, frivolous woman, living only for dress and pleasure and display, look at Catherine of Siena; look at what womanhood has been when sanctified by the Cross. Can you dare to go on living only this empty life of pleasure when you too might be a woman like that? Is there a youth here living only for dollars; living only for success, hoping, some day or other, to arrive at that perilous eminence where the millionaire enjoys his doubtful pleasures? Come and look upon a man I once knew. Simple youth that he was, he was so foolish as to think that the world could be converted, and so heroic as to think that God wanted him to do something in converting it. He went to Africa, and was there a year only when he died, and as he lay dying he said to his friend: “ You are going back to Manchester, I hope. When you get there go to my old Sunday school; go to the girl I was to have married; tell her and tell them all that my last

words as I lay dying in Africa were, 'Let a thousand die, but never give up Africa.' " I would rather be that young man dying there in Africa than be the master of millions of dollars. So would you if you would think of it for a moment. Are you satisfied, then, with your life? That is the first great question that comes home to you to-night.

And then, when this prophet of life has put his question, there is another prophet who enters silently into the heart and begins to accuse us of our sins—the prophet of our Conscience; and in his hand are the seven rays of light, and his countenance is as a flame of fire, and it is his work to illumine our hearts, that we may know what manner of men and women we are. Turn your eyes for a moment to another scene in the history of David, when another prophet called Nathan enters the palace and begins to tell his terrible and dramatic story about the ewe lamb. You all know the story. The most terrible thing in the tale of David's sin is this: David did not seem to know that he had sinned. He ate and drank and went about his business and retained correct and just sentiments about the sins of other people, but not once did he see that there was no worse criminal walking the earth than himself. He listens to Nathan's story with sincere indignation. He acts in the spirit of Shakespeare's

famous phrase, "Let the galled jade wince, my withers are unwrung." And we also have seen this same phenomenon. We have seen judges on the bench, of notoriously evil lives, who have punished others for the sins of which they themselves were guilty; and, incredible as it may appear, they have not been wholly insincere, because it is possible to have combined in the strange heart of man the keenest vision of another's sin without a suspicion of the nature of our own. I do not believe, for example, that that unhappy man, Whitaker Wright, who died some months ago, was conscious of his offence. I think he believed himself entirely just and honourable according to his imperfect notions of what justice and honour meant. And that is the most damning effect of sin—it blinds us. "The god of this world," says the Apostle, "has blinded the eyes of those that believe not." But with a single word, when Nathan enters the palace, the scales fall from the eyes of David. "Thou art the man," and it is as though the whole heavens broke into flame about the unhappy king. The prophet spake, and sin became manifest. The prophet spake, and the ewe lamb becomes God's lamb, and the wrong done to one solitary and friendless human creature is a wound made in the heart of God Himself. In that moment David knew what it was to cry for the rocks to fall and



cover him from the face of Him who sat on the throne and from the *wrath of the Lamb*. The prophet of conscience had spoken, and his message was unmistakable.

Macaulay has a story, in one of his essays, of a Hindoo, by whom, of course, every drop of the water of the Ganges was revered as sacred. A European gave him a microscope and put a drop of Ganges water upon the lens and bade him look. He looked, and was horrified to find that the sacred Ganges swarmed with pollution. So he broke the microscope! That is what a great many of you are doing. You turn from reproof; you avoid the messages of God; you get out of the way of those who are likely to tell you things you don't want to hear; and, if you choose a minister, you choose one who speaks smooth words, and whose voice is like the voice of one that singeth to a pleasant instrument. I call that breaking the microscope. And think of the futility of it all! The drop of water has not ceased to be impure because you don't see it, and the Ganges is still rushing on bearing all its deadly infections with it. Moreover, to have seen it once is to see it forever, for the memory has an eye. Look at the truth, then, however horrible it is. Don't try to hide yourself under shams and pretences, for there is no regeneration and no redemption for the man who won't look at the plain truth about himself.

I will tell you what has cut me most to the heart in the work I have tried to do during the past twelve months. It is this: I have met men, again and again, in whom there is no truth. They will not face up to the facts of their own case. They will tell me they have signed the pledge and are keeping it, when they reek of drink, and they think I am fool enough not to smell it. You may smile, but is there anything more terrible and tragic than this utter crumbling away of character, when a man has not enough honesty left in him to face the truth about himself? If I despair of any man, I despair of that man, because I do not know how to deal with him. He is like a rotten wall. Every time you knock the nail in, it falls out again. I plead, therefore, with any one here whose conscience troubles him about his sins, and I say, "For God's sake, be honest with yourself. No equivocation, no evasion. Look the plain truth in the face. Advise, and tell this prophet of conscience what reply he is to give to Him who sent him."

And then there is one other prophet, and this prophet also comes to us all—the Prophet of Redemption. No cowed and awful figure this, bearing the books of life and time: no prophet of conscience, clad in flame and with the fiery sword that turns both ways, but One very meek and quiet, yet with a more awful light upon His

brow than Nathan even had, and in His hands there are wound-prints, and from His side a broken heart pours out its life-blood, and His likeness is as the likeness of a Man.

Long ago the sacred poet foresaw Him, and cried: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? And wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy garments like His that treadeth the winepress?" And He gave this great reply: "I am He that speaketh in righteousness, mighty to save; for I looked, and there was none to help. I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore My own arm brought salvation." And a thousand times ten thousand have seen Him since, and have rejoiced. They have seen what Malvolti, the murderer in "John Inglesant," saw, One drawing near, worn and pale, but full of undying love and unquenchable resolve, who says: "What doest thou here? Knowest thou not that thou art Mine? Thrice Mine—Mine centuries ago when I hung upon the cross on Calvary for such as thee; Mine years ago when thou camest a little child to the font; and Mine even now, murderer as thou art?" And with the accent of that voice a healing sense of help and comfort visited the weary heart. For this Prophet of Redemption comes not to kill, but to save. His is the voice that says: "Come unto Me, and I

will give you rest''; and when His finger touches the blotted page, behold! it becomes clean, and when His hand is laid upon the soiled and sorrowing heart it creates new life and new joy.

My brethren, what have you to say to Jesus to-night? He puts to you the old question: "Will ye be My disciples?" "What think ye of Christ?" For you must give an answer if only for this plain reason: your character and life are always moving towards finality. Already you have said yea to Christ in many a good impulse, and you have said nay in many a bad impulse. You have said yea in every striving after right, in every prayer for help, in every secret tear for sin or folly; and you say nay in every act of deliberate resistance to the call of the better self within you. And you know that these messages, spoken in the quiet of your own hearts, are real messages. O young man, was not that a real message from God that came to you that morning when you woke up out of a night of sin, not merely sorry for yourself, but sick of yourself, and with a living horror of yourself? Was not it a Divine message that spoke to you, you older man, when you broke down in your business career, and for many months had to be quiet and silent, and had to think about the things that you had been forgetting all your life? Was not that a Divine

message that came to you, O frivolous and vain woman, when the little child went out of your home, and it seemed to you that all God's angels stood about the little coffin and whispered to you how good a thing it would be if only you would live so as to meet that sweet child again? You have had your messages, and now you must give your answers. It has often been said of the preacher that he differs from the barrister in this important fact: the barrister speaks for a verdict and the minister does not. I speak for a verdict on behalf of my Lord and Master. Advise, and tell me what I am to say to Him who has sent me. It is no use merely talking about religion night after night. The time has come to do something. Is there no one here to-night who, before the next moment on the clock marks its irreparable limit, in his heart will say: "Jesus, I am upon Thy side. I come to Thee. I pray for pardon. Henceforth I am Thy servant, Thy lover, surrendered wholly to Thy most blessed will"? I plead with you for a verdict. Advise now, and tell me what answers shall be returned to my Master and Lord for the messages of grace and love that I bring you in the Master's name.

## VIII

### THE LAST STEP

*(Plymouth Church, Thursday, November 17th.)*

**M**Y subject to-night is "The Last Step," and my text will be found in Matthew xxvi. 39: "He went a little further."

There is a strange pregnancy in these phrases of the Gospel. The life of Jesus is the most familiar of all lives. Its incidents are constantly recited and reiterated. Whole libraries have been written about a life which may itself be contained within a few pages, and one cannot but ask how it is that the life of Jesus has this imperishable hold upon the minds of men? The answer is that the life of Jesus is the most representative of all lives. It represents, not the surfaces, but the depths of human lives. We find ourselves in Jesus; we find our hopes, our inward struggles, our most secret aspirations, all the secret biography of our own spirits, which we reveal to no one, in the story of Jesus; and hence every phrase in the story has a strange pregnancy, and looking through the smallest phrase there opens up to us a mar-



vellous vista of self-revelation as well as Divine revelation.

Now here is such a phrase—quite a natural and simple phrase—necessary to the narrative, of which it forms a part; but the moment you begin to let your thought rest upon it, it reveals extraordinary depths. “He went a little further.” Do you not already feel the awful loneliness conveyed by the words: the sense of separation, the sense of solitude? Jesus is approaching the solemn climax of His life, and as He draws near to it the solitude deepens. He has long since left the home of His mother and His brethren, and will see it no more. He has but recently left the sacred home of Bethany, that haven of peace where He has often rested, and where the hands of Mary have anointed Him against His burial. He has even now left the chamber of the Paschal supper, and the seal of finality has been put upon His earthly ministry in the drinking of the cup when He said to His disciples, “*Remember Me.*” He has just left eight of His disciples at the outer gate of Gethsemane, saying, “Stay ye here while I go and pray yonder.” A few moments later and He parts from Peter and James and John, saying, “Tarry ye here and watch with Me,” and He went a little further. It was but a stone’s throw, says St. Luke, and yet an infinite gulf now lay between Him and them. And so it is

always in human life. We must needs go to the most sacred places of our life alone. We can bear no witnesses when the agony of life gathers around us. We must needs go a little further beyond the kind gaze of friends, beyond their pity and their help, when the great transactions of the soul are to be achieved. "He went a little further," as it were a stone's throw, but in these few steps our Lord passed from the loud life of the world into the silent places of the infinite and the eternal.

Now this loneliness of life in its common forms we all know something about. We know, for instance, that the parting of friends is one of the commonest experiences of life. People come into our lives for a time; they seem inseparable from us, and then by force of circumstances or by some slowly widening difference of temper or opinion, or by one of those many social forms of separation of which life is full, they slowly drift out of our touch and our life. "We must part, as all human creatures have parted," wrote Dean Swift to Alexander Pope, and there is no sadder sentence than that in human biography. It strikes upon the ear like a knell. The tragedy of long life often lies in its final solitude. The old man has outlived friends and kinsfolk, and even children. Some have tarried here and some there upon the way, and you have had to go on. If you thought

much about these things, which, by the mercy of God you do not, life would become intolerable to you in its retrospects. But it is quite another form of loneliness that we find here: it is the loneliness of the hero and the thinker. The first law of all heroism is the courage to go on when others are left behind. The acceptance of loneliness is the necessary condition of all rare and difficult achievement. Think of what that "little further" meant for Christ. Why, the whole world's redemption depended upon that last step. All the exquisite teaching of the Galilean lake would have been lost to the world if Jesus had refused the last step that took Him to Gethsemane and the Cross. And that step He must take alone, because none but Himself understood its meaning and its necessity. The disciples who loved Him best did not understand it. They did not understand it because they loved Him. There had already been times in their history when they turned back from Christ. Christ alone knew that His path lay through Gethsemane, and He knew that He must take it alone. The great hero must always act in that spirit if he is to succeed. We are all of us apt to rest too much upon one another for support, and we fear to take our own way according to the conviction of our own souls. But no boldness of thought and no heroism of conduct will ever be possible to us until we have

learned to stand alone and to "go a little further." You remember that the favourite lines of General Gordon, which he often quoted in those splendid lonely days at Khartoum, were the lines taken from Browning's "Paracelsus"—

"I see my way as birds their trackless way,  
I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,  
I ask not: but unless God send His hail,  
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,  
In some time, His good time, I shall arrive:  
He guides me and the bird."

General Gordon took that last great and lonely step into the terrible Gethsemane of martyrdom. The man who will not face Gethsemane and the loneliness of it cannot be a hero.

Now, for us this theme has a cogent and, I hope, personal application. Has it not suggested to you already what it suggests to my mind, viz., how many of us fail for lack of the last step? What is the secret of great men? Is it not this: that they have gone just a step further than their fellows? Is it not that they have put upon themselves and upon their task just that touch of consecration which their fellows lacked? They have dared to go a step further into the dark and more difficult places of achievement. You can find a hundred men of high intellectual competence for one man of genius, and you can find a hundred men of

ordinary bravery for one hero, and the difference between the one and the other is this: in the great genius and in the great hero there is just that touch of daring temper, of abandonment of self, that makes them go a step further into some lonely and difficult place where others will not venture. You remember the historical contrast between Erasmus and Luther. We think of Erasmus and Luther in a very different way. For the one we have admiration, for the other we have passionate affection and reverence, and the difference of our appreciation is the difference in the men. Erasmus says, as the darkness thickens around him: "I intend to be true to the truth as far as the times will allow." Luther says: "Here I take my stand. I cannot retract." Erasmus is not going to take the step further; Luther took it. And, my brethren, it is the last step that tells. The world is full of men who just miss sainthood and just miss the highest and most beautiful kind of fame because they won't take the last step.

Think for a moment of the story of the young ruler, as you read it in the Gospels. The young ruler had gone a long way toward a perfect life. He was pure—fastidiously pure—high-minded, noble-spirited, but he would not take the last step of complete renunciation. He lacked one thing, and that was complete indifference to the

world and its wealth for the sake of truth. That was the last step for him, and when he was face to face with the Gethsemane of renunciation he had "great possessions" and "went away grieved," and would not enter. Will you consult your own hearts for a moment and tell me whether that story is not in essence your story? All that lies between you and the Divine life is a single step, a single act. There is some secret attachment to the world, some reluctance to break the law of social convention, some remnant of a false pride, but there it is. You are but a stone's cast from the kingdom, yet you cannot, or will not, take the last step. Jesus teaches you this great lesson: that the step must be taken, and if it is to be taken it will only be by consulting your own soul, as in the presence of God, and listening to no human voice. Say to your friends, say to the whole world: "Tarry ye here. I am going to meet my God and settle matters with Him." That is what the last step means.

There was a man who came into the inquiry-room during a mission in my own church whose story was a singular one. He was a gentleman by birth and education, and had held a considerable and responsible position in the British army. He had been a moral, a high-living, and apparently Christian man for years, but in his career there was one thing that poisoned



and spoiled his life—the memory of a sin. He thought (and perhaps he had reason to think) that in a certain transaction years before he had not been strictly honest. This had troubled him. The gentleman who spoke to him upon the matter said (and I think it was a very wise and tactful way of putting the truth to him), “Sir, I think I can understand how you feel. It is like a grain of sand in the eye; it is not much, but you will never be at ease until it is taken out.” The man drew himself up and replied: “That is perfectly true. I will go home and this night I will write a full account of what happened years ago. I will send it to the War Office and stand by the result.” Now, here was a man who for twenty years had been kept back from the last step by a single grain of sand, as it were, and it had marred his life.

The words of Jesus are full of lessons upon this theme. Do you remember His story of the pearl? The man who had many goodly pearls saw a better pearl, and having seen it, he sold all that he had to buy the perfect pearl. I thought of that passage the other day when, in a certain city, a great merchant showed me in his shop a dish of pearls and began to explain their qualities to me. Even to my inexperienced eye some appeared to be faulty, and when he put a pearl perfect in shape and lustre alongside the others I said: “If I were going to buy

pearls, I would have that one—it is a perfect one.” So Christ pictures a man who, having seen a perfect thing, will not put up with an imperfect one. But alas! for most of us, we are content with flawed virtues and mediocre qualities. We hesitate to sacrifice what is necessary for the best. What is it that holds us back from the sacrifice? Is it anything worth keeping? We know when we look into our own hearts that it is not. There is nothing that we have and that we can surrender that is worth keeping at the price of losing Christ.

Let me speak for a moment to the Church and to Christians, for it seems to me that this lesson comes home to us also. It is not for want of divine and lofty ideals that the Church has failed to assert and maintain its authority over human conduct. Love, charity, self-sacrifice, brotherhood—to what church will you go where you will not hear the golden chime of these words ringing like heavenly music? The Christian life—who questions that there are multitudes of people who do, according to their measure, try to live that life? Ah, but how few of us are prepared to take the last step and to encounter real sacrifices for and with Jesus Christ? When it comes to a real contempt for the world’s opinion, a real adherence to principle which involves persecution; when it comes

to a real love for publicans and sinners, a definite and deep resolve to count all things but loss for the sake of Christ, then how few of us are ready to take the last step!

What the Church needs to-day is not defenders of the faith, however eloquent or wise, but the actual spectacle of Christian lives which are wholly distinct and distinguishable from the lives of worldly men—lives content and meek and laborious, lives consistently devoted to the service of mankind, lives that have taken the last step of complete surrender to the will of God. And when the Church is filled with men and women who live those lives we shall not need to pray at every meeting, “Thy kingdom come,” for the proclamation will go forth, “The kingdoms of this world *have become* the kingdoms of God and of His Christ.” And if you would know how true this is, glance back through the shadows of the past to the early Church. Witness the astounding conquest that a handful of unlettered and ignorant men made of the great pagan world. How did they do it? They overcame the world by renouncing it. They were not afraid of Gethsemane. They dared to suffer, they dared to die. They

“Fought against frowns with smiles, gave glorious chase  
To persecutions, and against the face  
Of death and fiercest dangers durst with brave  
And stalwart steps march on to meet a grave.”

And you can see the same spectacle to-day if you look in the right direction. The man who succeeds in extending God's kingdom is the man who makes himself of no reputation. The man who succeeds in his own lifetime in seeing the kingdom grow up in stability and beauty is the man who thinks nothing of himself, who goes a little further beyond the spheres of self-interest and self-thought into the realm where nothing but complete surrender to Christ is possible. Ah! let the Church ponder this word, for it is at once the reproach and the inspiration of the Church. And it may be but a very little further that you and I need to go to turn defeat into victory. Just one last touch of self-sacrifice and we also may see the coming of the kingdom and the conquest of the Cross.

Jesus "went a little further," and He found God in the gloom. Remember that for these disciples there was no God in Gethsemane. There was only the misery of lost faith and present failure. They followed Christ to the gateway of Gethsemane and there all clue to the meaning of the Divine life seemed lost. They were "sleeping for sorrow," says St. Luke—men worn out, broken with misery, conscious of the footfall of approaching tragedy. Jesus *entered* Gethsemane, and there He found God and the clue of life became clear. He found the clue of life when He said: "Not My will,

but Thine, be done." And so you find that from this moment Jesus moves to His end in majestic calm. The agony is passed, and it is passed for ever. He knows the darkness but the shadow of God's wing. He speaks henceforth as one who sees the dawn, and has the light of dawn upon His brow.

Long before, in the history of his race, a man had entered into the same awful gloom and had wrestled with an angel in the dark, and had come forth from the conflict with a new name and nature. Jesus repeats the experience of Jacob, and the lesson is the same in each history. The lesson is that our truest and deepest experience of God is often won out of our darkest hours.

I always find it difficult to speak of these things for fear that I may seem insincere, but may I put to you an interrogation for a moment? I will venture to ask those whose experience of life has been the most profound, and who may be trusted to tell the truth about it, whether they have not found, again and again, that their darkest hour has brought with it the brightest revelation of God? I do not say it is always so. It will depend upon what kind of spirit we ourselves bring to the dark hour. I have known men whose whole religion seemed to evaporate at the first touch of sorrow, but on the other hand I have known men who have felt

that they never had God's hand really close in theirs until they clasped it in the dark. There is a friend of mine, a dear and brilliant friend, whose name would be honoured by you all if I were free to mention it. He told me the other day the darkest chapter of his life. He told me how his whole life lay suddenly broken off in disaster: his work ended, his heart broken, himself in hospital suffering cruel pain. And then he said: "Oh, Dawson, what visions of God I had as I lay in hospital! what a sense of eternity, and the reality of things spiritual! I tell you, if I knew to-day I could only gain such visions of God and truth by repeating my sufferings I would crawl upon my hands and knees across this continent to get that disease!" Ah! there lies the justification of our Gethsemanes. We need the utter loneliness, we need the separation from friend and lover, to make us sure of God. "And Jacob was left alone," says the older record; "and there wrestled a man with him till the breaking of the day." Even so—till *the breaking of the day*, for the divinest of all dawns shines in the Gethsemane of sacrifice.

I will venture to give the phrase yet one more application. There are many people who fail to find God because they will not go far enough in search of Him. There was no God, I repeat, at that hour for the disciples who stood outside



the gate of Gethsemane. They saw nothing but evil trampling upon good, nothing but the victorious powers of darkness, nothing but a confused, anarchic world in which righteousness was a lost cause. But Jesus knew better. He entered the gloom and found the Father there. Be sure of it, in the worst darkness God is to be found. He is to be found where it seems unlikeliest that you should find Him. Some of you are doubting the goodness and existence of God because you see so many sad things in the world. If you would only go a little nearer to the heart of things you might find, as a German poet puts it, that—

“Everything inferior is a higher in the making,  
Everything hateful is a coming beautiful,  
And everything evil is a coming good.”

March boldly into the dark Gethsemane, and you will find, not only the sweat of blood, but the Angel that strengthens you, the angel of peace in the house of sorrow, and the angel of patience in the house of poverty, and the angel of the resurrection in the house of death. And it may be if some of you who doubt would go a little further and doubt your own doubts, if you would just risk one final struggle for faith, you also would find your doubts gone and the angel would strengthen you. “Jesus went a little further,” and He met the angels.

The last thing I want to say to-night is that religion is the intimate contact of the individual soul with God, and it needs no intermediary. The preacher may help you, but the preacher cannot do your thinking for you; he cannot do your believing for you. You yourself have to come at last to the realisation of the fact that in all the world there is only you and God, the soul and its Creator, the Father and the child, the spirit and its Redeemer—only you and God. Every other human presence vanished, and through the great abyss your spirit answering to the spirit that made you; and this fact, that the human spirit can thus come close to God, is a fact justified by human experience. A day or two before I left home an old minister came to see me. He was eighty-four, and as he went down the steps from my house he shook my hand and said: “ I would like to say that everything is growing brighter and happier with me every day. My friends,” he added, “ don’t like me to go out alone, because they are afraid I may drop dead, but if I drop dead here I shall be alive and happy up there ”; and the old, white-headed man went away with his face shining like an angel’s. That is an authentic human experience. What that man found you may find—the serenity of the perfect peace, joy, and trust in God; and the last step of faith that takes you to your God is the step that counts

for everything. "The little more, how much it is; the little less, how far away!"

Oh, brother, oh, sister, won't you for a moment to-night think of what it is, and how little it is, that keeps you from being a true Christian? It will be no comfort to you to say, in the hour when you come to die: "I very nearly took the last step once. I was at a meeting in Plymouth Church, and the truth laid hold of me, and I was almost a Christian. It might have been."

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest are these, 'It might have been.'"

My brother, take the last step to-night. Take it now. You have but a little further to go, it may be to Christ. You have but to make one swift decision: you have but to collect the impressions of years into one solemn vow, one definite act of surrender and consecration. And behold, this is the accepted time, this is the Day of Salvation.

## IX

### TO THE UTTERMOST

*(Plymouth Church, Friday, November 18th.)*

THE two passages upon which I shall base my address are to found in Hebrews ii. 8: "But we see Jesus"; and in the seventh chapter of the same epistle and the twenty-fourth verse, "Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him."

The great conception of the writer of this Epistle, whom we may suspect to have been St. Paul, is Jesus Christ as the centre of humanity and the centre of the universe; the centre of authority, love, worship, and service—all things converging on Christ; all things radiating from Christ. He sees Christ as the holiest among the mighty, the mightiest among the holy, crowned with many crowns; the King of kings, the Lord of lords. He is the Lord of two worlds—one that is in accord, the other that is in revolt—and as the angels worship Him who was made a little lower than the angels, by the suffering of death, so men shall worship Him

who has been triumphant by sacrifice. Jesus must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. All the worlds are hastening to the coronation of Jesus, and last of all, the world which He purchased with His own blood shall own His sway, and so Christ shall be all and in all.

Now, that is a magnificent conception beyond doubt, but the ordinary man will say: "What has it to do with me? It may interest the dreamer of dreams and the writer of epics and the master of intricate and sublime theologies, but what relation has it with common men and women toiling in a difficult and harsh world?" The answer is that Paul also toiled in a difficult and harsh world, and he found that world intolerable except for the vision of Jesus. Every plainest, humblest man needs and seeks some explanation of the world in which he lives. There is nothing more pathetic in recent literature than the closing sentence of Herbert Spencer's autobiography, in which he says that he has come to "regard religious creeds with a sympathy based on community of need." Spencer felt that he needed something he had not found. Paul felt that he could not live without an explanation of the world, and the explanation of the world for Paul, as it has been for multitudes through the ages, is Jesus Christ.

“ We see Jesus.” What is it that he sees? He sees the lost sovereignty of man. He sees something wrong with man. There is something that retards him from greatness—all things are not put under him. He sees, in the second place, the sovereignty regained in Jesus, because He has put under Himself all things that hinder man from greatness. And so he sees Christ as the last hope of humanity. Christ interprets man. Christ vindicates man. Christ raises man up to His own level and wins back for him his lost sovereignty. “ He is able to save to the uttermost.” That is the great threefold conception of Christianity, and it is as though from some shining coign of vantage, above the confused strife of this unintelligible world, the Apostle looks far into the future and says: “ I see man, man with all his brutality and folly and crime, but I also see Jesus. I see Jesus, who, being man, carried the manhood into godhead. He is the promise of man’s universal redemption.”

Think for a moment, then, of what is meant by the lost sovereignty of man, for that is the first part of this vision. All things are not put under him. When we think of man in relation to the universe there are two moods that have power over us. The first is the mood of unbounded admiration for man and for his doings. It is Shakespeare’s mood expressed in the im-



mortal soliloquy of Hamlet.—“ What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! in form and moving how expressive and admirable; in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! ” It was Dr. Hillis’ mood the other day, when, as we walked over Brooklyn Bridge, he pointed out to me the wonders of the vast structure, and dilated on the genius that planned and built it. And undoubtedly we do see man perpetually doing things which no other creature upon the earth gives a sign of possessing the faculty to do. We see him throwing a film of wire like a gossamer round the earth on which he whispers his thoughts, levelling his tiny lenses against the midnight sky and compelling the firmament to give up the secrets of its stars and constellations; fashioning, from rude hieroglyphics, music and literature; taking hold of matter and controlling it with so marvellous a skill and mastery that, looking upon man, we are amazed; we are lost in admiration; we are astonished at the brilliance of his invention, the restlessness of his mind and the resources of his will, and we begin to understand how the primal temptation of man was to take himself for a god. For there is something of the lost sovereignty still left upon him, and all the original glory has not yet faded from his brow,

Ah, but there is another mood, a mood that comes to us when we are conscious, not of the greatness of man, but of the futility and the impotence of man. All things put under him—the lordship of matter—able to erect a Brooklyn Bridge—aye, but the fool of destiny and the sport of time! He sows and he knows not who shall reap; he heaps up, and he knows not who shall gather; he builds his palaces and cities, but the lightning blasts his work and the fire destroys his city; his life is not worth a moment's purchase; he is in jeopardy every hour. Just at the height of thought the brain snaps—he is an imbecile. Just on the brink of triumph a nerve vibrates—he is a gibbering paralytic. His plans are broken off in ruin; the tide runs from him; men fail him, till, at last, in his bitterness, he cries that even the stars fight against him. All things under his feet? No, indeed, neither circumstance, nor sorrow, nor pain, nor death; and he can sink so low, he can become so bestial in his lusts, so mean and malevolent in his acts, that a dog might scorn him, a horse might refuse companionship with him. All things are not put under man, and yet the whisper of greatness haunts his mind, the potency of kinship tortures him. For this is the paradox of human nature, greatness and meanness, wisdom and folly interwoven; and all this is expressed by the

phrase of the writer in this chapter when he speaks of the lost sovereignty of man.

The question, then, which at once comes to the thoughtful man is, Can man rise again? Can he regain this lost sovereignty? Here is man in thralldom—a threefold thralldom—to sin, to self, to death. He fails of moral height and grandeur through sin; he fails of nobility through selfishness; he fails of permanence in his designs through death. To be truly great, man should be sinless, unselfish, and immortal. Can a man become that? The answer is, “ We see Jesus.” We see in Him complete manhood. We see in Christ man as God meant man to be, and the great word comes echoing down to us in its infinite and almost incredible promise: “ Till we all come to the stature of a man in Christ.” “ We see Jesus ” regaining the lost sovereignty, but how?

First of all, Jesus put sin under Him and teaches us that there lies the way of our deliverance. The conception of a sinless man exists only in Christianity. A prophet, a seer, an inspired man, one who holds converse with the heavens, that conception exists in all religions; but the idea of one who is sinless, who never wronged another, who never had a wrong thought, on whose clear soul no shadow of evil fell, though all the atmosphere of evil was around him always, this is the absolutely

unique conception of Christianity, and it is something beyond the invention of man. The blind imagination of man could never have created that figure of the Christ, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, but it was the conception of God, and it was perfected in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus challenged His worst foes, who watched Him with the sleepless scrutiny of malice, to convict Him of sin, and they were silent. He passed His life, not in the sweet solitude of the mountains, but in the heat and wrong of cities; not in holy seclusion, but in the eye of all men. He was never unattended; He ate with publicans while Pharisees watched Him; He talked with sinners while Sadducees listened to Him; yet the taint of all this moral leprosy never touched or soiled Him. Upon the brink of death He declares, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." His judge declared, as he sentenced Him, that He had done no wrong at all. His herald proclaimed Him the Lamb of God; and it is as a lamb, sinned against but not sinning, that He goes to the slaughter. He put sin under Him; trod it down as a venomous snake; died with the whole voice of heaven and earth witnessing around and above His Cross, in awful unanimity, that He died for sins not His own.

And "we see Jesus." We turn from the

spectacle of man in his abasement as one in a lazar-house might lift his head and see entering the abode of shame the white-robed minister of mercy and "we see Jesus." We see that sinlessness is possible. We see that though the serpent has stung us, yet there is One who can slay the serpent. And Jesus reveals to us our own future. Jesus shows us what we may be and become. His dying lips blow the trumpet of hope. His voice rings round the world; hear it and rejoice! for it is the announcement of your own sovereignty restored and your own kingship come back to you—"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Man has failed of nobility through selfishness, and, again, "we see Jesus." What is the source of all human sin but selfishness? What is the source of that act which takes the wealth of life for yourself and leaves your fellow-man to starve unpitied? What is the root of that pleasure of passion which for a moment of intoxicating delight will fling a wrong and blighted woman on the world's highway, to be spurned by the wicked, scorned by the righteous, picked by the vulture, and flung as carrion to the tomb? What is it that fills our city streets with wasted faces and our city graves with broken hearts? Selfishness. Men live for

themselves; love themselves; think only of themselves; and then self masters them. They become its slaves; they cease to have dominion over their baser lusts; they come under the power of those passions which God meant they should be over in just and righteous mastery. Oh, do you despair when you think of it? Do you say, "I was born a slave, a slave I must die. I cannot break the chain. I know I am selfish"? Oh, coward, hearken! "We see Jesus," born as we were born; dying as we must die; Jesus, who never did a selfish deed; Jesus, whose life was one long and perfect sacrifice, and He stands beside the Cross of Calvary red with His own blood, and lifts His wounded hand to proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of prison doors to them that are bound. Christ puts self beneath His feet, and so points you the way back to your lost kinship.

And Christ also puts death beneath His feet. Have you ever thought of death as the last revenge of sin? It turns the fair body into corruption, for it is by and through corruption that it receives its power and mandate. It treads the body, the work of God, down beneath its iron feet, and the "sting of death is sin," for it is by sin that death has gained power to smite us and afflict us and drag us down into the foul chambers of decay. Do you dread death? Who



does not? Do you tremble as its cold breath passes over you? Have you implored it to spare you? Have you striven to pluck your sweet child from its grasp? Have you wept bitter, fruitless tears as Death went out of the house and took the light of the house with him? Hush, weeping Mary, let thy tears be wiped away. Look! "We see Jesus." He stands, bright and fair, in the doorway of the tomb; no blood-stain on His raiment, no sorrow on His brow, and two young men, from that city where men are never old, sit in the empty tomb and smile, and He says: "I am the resurrection and the life, whoso believeth in Me shall never die." There is your lost sovereignty come back in Christ. Christ has thus overcome sin, conquered self, and subjugated death, and ascended into heaven, leading captivity captive. And Paul looks and cries "All things are yours." "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Cephas, or Apollos, or life or death." Death is yours. You are no longer his; for when you come to Christ and share His love and life, you have got the power to trample sin down; you have got the power to purge yourself of self, and you will have the power to rise victor over death. This is the great threefold vision of Christianity. This is what we see when we see Jesus.

This is what Christ has done. He has carried manhood up into Godhead. And now, oh, my

brothers, will you try to receive into your minds the most tremendous thought that can enter any human mind? As Christ was man, so men may be as Christ. There is a Christ in every man, a suggested Christ, a concealed Christ, an embryo Christ, and you also may stand victor over the foes that have spoiled your manhood, for "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." Amazing thought! A sublime impertinence it seems for us even to use the words. Yet the words of Jesus are clear: "I go to prepare a place for you. Where I am ye may be also." And the word of St. Paul is clear—"Let the mind that was in Christ be the mind that is in you." I see you frail, weak, sinful, weary; a poor creature enough, it may be. Ah, but I see Jesus in you, for even your poor heart may become the Bethlehem of the new incarnation of the Son of God. "What?" you say; "do you really believe that? Do you mean to tell me that there is a Christ in that poor drunkard lying in the gutter to his shame and defilement?" Yes, I do. His name is John Gough. "What?" you say; "do you mean to tell me that there is a Christ concealed in that woman laden with iniquity, the mere knowledge of whose life is an infection to a pure imagination?" Yes, I do, for her name is Mary Magdalene. "What?" you say; "do you mean to tell me that there is a Christ con-

cealed in the criminal fresh out of jail? ” Yes, I do, for it was to a man like that Jesus said: “ This day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” I may see all that is distasteful, all that is hateful, and all that is contemptible in you, but I also see Jesus in you. I see the Christ that is to be. Aye, and Christ sees Himself in you. He saw the apostle of love in John, the son of thunder, and He saw the apostle of grace in Saul the persecutor. He sees Himself in you. When Sister Dora lay dying and wrote her last letter—her life, you remember, was spent among smallpox patients; she literally gave her life for others—to a woman who was going to take up nursing as a profession, she said: “ Don’t think of it as a profession, but as you touch each patient think it is Christ whom you are touching, and then virtue will come out of the touch to yourself.” She had learned to see a Christ in her patients. Christ sees Himself in you. And if you say, “ This sounds like a dream ”; if you listen incredulously; if, knowing far more about your sin than any one else does, you say, “ I am removed whole infinities from the character of Christ; how can I live like that? ”—Jesus speaks to you: “ He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him.”

Do you believe it? Come with me to mediæval times for a moment, and look on this picture

from the life of Catherine of Siena. There was a certain criminal, Nicolo Tuldo, who was condemned to die, and he did nothing but curse God, so that no priest would go near him. Then Catherine went, and he became quiet as a child, and he made her promise to stand beside him on the day of his execution, and, says Catherine, speaking of the scene: "He laid his head upon my bosom, and I said, 'Comfort thee, my brother, the block shall soon become thy marriage altar; the blood of Christ shall bathe thy sins away.' And when the time came for him to die he died as a gentle lamb, and his last words were, 'Jesus, Catherine, Jesus.'"

"Ah," but you say, "that is a mediæval story; that happened in the age of faith; such things do not happen now." Well, here is something that happened about a year ago in my own country. I read in a paper one morning the story of a dreadful murder. The murderer was condemned, and justly condemned, and, I said in my heart, if ever a man deserved to be hanged it was that man. I felt as though I would like to see him hanged, so atrocious was the crime. I thought no more of it, but a few months later I met a friend of mine, a minister, who among other duties had become a visiting chaplain at Wandsworth jail, and he told me about this man, this execrable villain, this human viper, whose crime was so atrocious that

men thought it was an act of just reparation to society that he should be thrust out of a decent world. My friend told me how he went to see that man in his cell, how he was as hard as iron, how at last he melted a little, how presently, with a burst of tears, he acknowledged that he once had been in a Methodist Sunday school. Then the man's heart slowly, very slowly, opened. One night when my friend was asleep, after midnight, there was a knock at his door, and a warder stood there with a message from the governor of the jail. The governor of the jail was not a man likely to be deceived by mock religion, and he had sent the warder to say, "Edwards is converted." Out of his bed my friend leaped, and through the dark night he went to Wandsworth jail and found the poor fellow on his knees singing a hymn which he had learned as a boy in the Sunday school—

"Although my sins as mountains rise  
And soar and reach to heaven,  
Forgiveness is above the skies,  
And I may be forgiven."

When the time came for that poor fellow to die he went down the dismal path to the scaffold softly whispering—

"Jesus, lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly."

That is not a mediæval story; it is a story of

yesterday. God's arm is not shortened that it cannot save even men like Edwards. God can still pluck from the very pit of hell the souls for whom Christ died. He is doing it every day, for He is able to save them to the uttermost that come to Him through Christ.

I know not how to close. I feel as though I could talk all night about the boundless grace of God; the lifting up of poor sinners into Christ-hood, into Christ-life, by infinite grace, for it is this fact of the grace of God in the world which alone makes me able to face the world. Oh, there are times when we are blind with tears and sick with misery as we look upon the world—it is so crammed and packed with tragedy. There are times when I have felt the sin of others as almost a physical defilement, times when the struggle to reform the world has seemed almost hopeless, for new tyrannies seem to have replaced the old, and the ancient wrongs seem endued with an indestructible vitality. But when that dark mood sweeps over me, I look from man to God, and I see Jesus. I see that great vision the poet Heine had when he pictured all the gods of wrong and lust seated at their banquet-table, and suddenly there enters a poor, pale Jew with a heavy cross upon his shoulder, and he flings down the cross upon the table before all the gods of wrong and lust, and behold they tremble, fade, dissolve, dis-



appear, and Jesus only is left supreme. Ah, that is what has happened in past history, and it is what is going to happen through the history of the future. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

Let me plead with you, my brother, once more. It is possible that some of you may be led to say, "Surely you have made a mistaken appeal to-night. You have told us stories of drunkards and criminals. You scarcely suppose we need that appeal. We are different." Different in what? In your clothes, it may be; but the heart may be as vile beneath broadcloth as beneath rags. In your education and in your culture, it may be; but what is education but the mere clothes of the mind, and culture but the mere clothes of your social position? Dare you say you are not a sinner? Dare you say you do not need a Saviour? Dare you say that Jesus is nothing to you because He has nothing to give you that you have not got? You know better. We all know that we have needs, and although we may not be sunk in the mire of vice, yet our hearts may be corrupt with selfishness. Tell me one thing: are you the man you want to be? Are you the woman you once dreamed you would be? Have you reached and become the best that you yourself have conceived and desired in the best moments of your life? If you have not, you need Jesus. Man

of education, man of culture, man of wealth as you may be, you need Jesus quite as much as the poor sinner in the outer darkness there. Shall we not even now, with the vision of the redeeming Christ before us, seek with Him to triumph over sin, self, and death? You have had your visions of Jesus many times. You have had them here, this week, it may be. Now may the vision become so clear that you can resist it no longer—the vision of Jesus coming to you, even you, and saying, “Follow Me.”

## X

### SONS OF THE TABERNACLE

*(Plymouth Church, Sunday Morning, November 20th.)*

THE subject this morning is "Sons of the Tabernacle," and the passage I have chosen for my text is Exodus xxxiii. 11: "Moses returned again into the camp, but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the Tabernacle."

There is something very beautiful and significant about the relations which existed between Joshua and Moses. It is the contact of maturity with youth, of the master with the scholar; and it suggests to us that deep, natural order which insures that the young should evermore step into the places of the aged and carry on the progress of the world. Ibsen, in one of his memorable plays, "The Master Builder," represents the master builder as oppressed by a strange fear. He hears the young knocking at the door, and he fears that the young will enter in and dispossess him. Such a fear as this is impossible to the wise and magnanimous man. The wise and magnanimous man has

learned long ago the truth that the necessary man does not exist, and that all the work we do is incomplete in itself; it is but an instalment in the plan of universal progress. The truly great and magnanimous man does what Moses did. He attaches young men to him and teaches them his methods and cheerfully anticipates the hour when they will take up the work which falls unfinished from his hands. And the youth who is magnanimous and noble-hearted will rejoice to be the humble pupil of the man who is fit to instruct him. He will learn to serve, that hereafter he may be fit to rule. That is the altogether beautiful and noble relation between Moses and Joshua. As Moses passed with shining face into the camp and the worshipping people watched with awe the splendid and majestic figure, Joshua, a young man, remains behind in the Tabernacle of his God, there seeking for the grace and purification that shall fit him to take up the work which Moses has relinquished.

But the scene has a deeper significance. It is not merely the dramatic association of old and young that interests us—the old man ending and the young man beginning his career—what we need to see is that the bond which is common to them is the great bond of a religious ideal. Moses is fresh from the vision of God; Joshua is seeking it. To many a man in that

great crowd of promiscuous Hebrew fugitives the thought of God was as yet a formless thought and religion was an empty phrase. Notwithstanding the miraculous deliverance from Egypt, the splendours of Sinai, the awfulness and the loneliness of the desert, they still had but an elementary sense of God and religion. They still yearned for the easy life of Egypt. They loved bondage more than liberty, "bondage with ease than strenuous liberty." They obeyed the law of Moses in pure terror, but no sooner was the great law-giver passed into the clouds than the bond of restraint was snapped and they cried out, "Make us gods that shall go before us; for as for Moses, the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has become of him." But Joshua was not one of these. He, more than any other man in that vast camp, responded to the spiritual passion of Moses. He felt God in every fibre of his young innocence. Religion for him, as for Moses, was the greatest thing in the world and the only enduring thing. And here, then, lies the significance of this story for us to-day.

I propose to you a large question, viz., Does the Church answer any real need in human nature? Does it fulfil any needful function in human life? Can we justify its existence? I need not remind you that there are many voices

which answer each one of these questions with a negative. The Church is regarded by some men as an effete institution; by others as an expensive anomaly, and by many more as a negligible factor in human life. "For myself," says one of the more outspoken antagonists of religion, "I never pray. I never feel the need of prayer. The habit of prayer tends to weaken character." And the same writer, speaking yet more bitterly, goes on to denounce what he calls "the mockery of Divine services in the midst of untaught ignorance, unchecked roguery, unbridled vice"—as though the ignorance and the roguery and vice were directly caused by the habit of worship. The same writer then proceeds to denounce the very word "holiness." He declares the word to be obnoxious and offensive, and the Church the home of cant and rant and fustian. Such is the way in which the more outspoken antagonists of religion regard the Church to-day, and there are thousands more who, while shrinking from this extreme violence of language, doubtless in their hearts are inclined to believe that a young man in the tabernacle presents a spectacle for irony and ridicule. Well, does he? Let us try to see what the Tabernacle did for Joshua; and through the lessons of this ancient story let us try to grasp what is the true function of the Church in our modern life.



Now, as I read the story of Joshua, and try to estimate his character, I find three notes in it: there is the spirit of devoutness, the spirit of restraint, and the spirit of heroism; and the root of each is religion. These were the fruits of the Tabernacle, and they were worthy fruits; and I claim, therefore, for the Church of Jesus Christ, that it does directly minister to the spirit of devoutness, the spirit of restraint, and the spirit of heroism.

First, for a moment, let us consider the spirit of devoutness and what it means. Joshua is a young man, and he departs not out of the Tabernacle. Does not that mean that he was sedulous to keep the freshness of his young devoutness? For is it not true that we all begin life with a certain dower of devoutness, a certain aptitude for reverence and goodness? The child is always devout. In the child's mind the very wonder of the world works the spirit of reverence. To the child prayer, God, and heaven, are natural and credible conceptions. Thus Wordsworth speaks of the child having in his heart "the murmur of the sea that brought him hither," of standing in the fresh light "that never was on land or sea," a light which all too early fades into "the light of common day." And what is it that most quickly and fatally destroys this first, fine, fresh devoutness of the mind? It is the cynicism which in this

age more than any other is the ruin and corruption of youth. And who does not know how it happens? A word whispered in the ear, the light, bitter talk which cheapens all good and gracious acts, the imputation of dishonest motives to honest men, the scorn of that which is serious and the ridicule of that which is high, until presently the bloom is rubbed away from life, and laughter itself has a bitter ring in it, and a youth knows the price of everything but the value of nothing, and least of all the value of the most valuable things in the world, such as innocence and the simple mind, and the truthful tongue and the incorrupt heart. And then, when the devout spirit disappears, the general scheme of conduct begins to be lowered, and the youth begins to slide down and down into a kind of life where purity and honour perish, until at last in some bitter hour he hears the cry of self-revelation—

“ We have done with hope and honour,  
 We are lost to love and truth;  
 We are dropping down the ladder rung by rung,  
 And the measure of our torment is the measure of our  
 youth.  
 God help us! for we knew the worst too young.”

That is the final fruit of cynicism and the lack of a devout mind. “ Keep innocence and do the thing that is right; so shalt thou be brought to thy latter end in peace,” is one of the golden

sentences of the Apocrypha, and some of you will recall the effect with which that sentence is put by a modern novelist into the mouth of a man who has committed a great crime, and in the very height of his fame discovers that his sin has found him out. What Joshua did was to keep innocence and the devout spirit. He knew its value; he knew that without it he was a ruined man. "Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the Tabernacle."

My brothers, I have come to a point of life now when some retrospect is possible. I can say, of many phases of life, the experiment is ended; I can see the conclusion of the whole matter. I have had manifold opportunities, far more than fall to most men, of studying the life of young men, especially in great cities; and of all the conclusions graven most deeply on my mind I think the deepest is this: the beginning of ruin is the loss of devoutness. I am not now speaking of irreverence of tongue or thought only; I am speaking of something far more subtle—the departure from the heart of that gracious habit of spiritual thought which we call devoutness, and my experience goes to prove that devoutness of temper cannot be maintained without those means of grace which the Church provides. I know in my own heart how soon the spirit of devoutness fades when

from any cause I am deprived of public worship for any length of time; and when I see a youth, to whom religious worship has been the atmosphere of childhood, gradually withdrawing himself from the means of grace, I tremble for him. I tremble for him because I have seen what it means. I have seen the light of aspiration dying out of young eyes, as the sunshine dies from a cloud, leaving only gloom. I have watched character and all the finer part of a man deteriorate. I have known rich men whose spiritual decay has been in the ratio of their worldly success, and at this hour I can think of men whom I loved, who once came with me to the house of God to keep Holy Day, who now lie in jail and the penitentiary, who are dying in charity wards of hospitals, who are rotting and starving in the streets, and all their misery began when they forsook the Tabernacle of their God. Consider it! Joshua, strong man as he was, knew where the strength of his life lay. It was in the temper of devoutness. He knew that he must grow a soul before he could live a great life and achieve a great career, and hence he "went not out of the Tabernacle."

Growing a soul! Yes, that is what the spirit of devoutness does for us, and I ask you whether that is not something worth doing, and something that is essential to the highest use of life? "Ah," men say, the men to whom the

word "holiness" is offensive, "we are not conscious of a soul, and we can get on very well without one." So men used to say of the slave—that he did not want liberty and was quite happy without it—but that was only because he was a slave. The moment you gave him liberty the slave found he did want it, and had always been wanting it, though he did not know it. It avails nothing to say you can get on without a soul. The question is, how much better could you get on with one? how much more of the height and breadth of life could you touch if your spiritual nature were developed as well as your intellectual nature? Therefore Joshua set himself to grow a soul. He found the soil, the temperature, the atmosphere for soul-growth in the Tabernacle of God. He had a great work to do as a builder of a nation, and knew the truth, which Mrs. Browning once expressed in pregnant phrase—

"It takes a soul  
To move a body; it takes a high-souled man  
To move the masses even to a cleaner sty."

And I say without fear of contradiction, that the great claim of the Church upon the world is that it has grown souls in men, and that these are the men who have done the most to uplift humanity. If that claim be true, who is there that will dare to speak of the Church as an

effete institution or as a negligible factor in the social evolution of mankind?

Then there is the second note: the spirit of restraint. Man is by nature the least rational of animals. He is intemperate, incontinent, extravagant, and therefore he needs what no other creature needs: moral restraint. He needs curbs and checks. He needs something he can fear; something he can obey; something higher than his own will; and where is he to find this restraint? It is found in the tremendous conception of man's personal responsibility to God; and the Church exists to enforce that conception. In the Tabernacle you meet your Maker. Here the law of heaven is revealed. It is the sacred shrine of pledge and vow, the awful vestibule of the Eternal. Joshua knew that. He knew that he needed some force of restraint upon his life, and we need it too. Where can we find that spirit of restraint so well as in those solemnities of reiterated worship which confirm us in allegiance to our Maker by constantly making the sense of God supreme in our thoughts, our consciences, and our lives? Men need the spirit of restraint, I say. They have always needed it, and hence you will find that the oldest thing in human life is religion—the bond that holds man to his unseen Creator and Judge. Prayer is older than parliaments; worship is a more



ancient thing than commerce. During my summer holiday this year I was much in lonely places exploring a beautiful and solitary district of England. I found little or nothing to remind me of the past commercial life of man. I found a great deal to remind me of his past religious life—the Druid's stone on the wide moor, the grey altar of ancient sacrifice, the broken cross—all eloquent of this need for the spirit of restraint in human life which man has felt in all ages. What men have needed through the centuries, do not we need? Nay, may I not ask, is not the most perilous feature of this age in which we live its lack of restraint?—its extravagant lust of pleasure; its mad race for gold; its violent and intemperate passions which perpetually overwhelm men and nations in ruin; and for this there is but one remedy: that spirit of restraint which comes into our common life when there is a common conception of our obligation as individuals to Almighty God. Joshua saw that if he was to escape the spirit of license which was the ruin of his people he must learn to live as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye. That was why he was in the Tabernacle.

I have spoken in these addresses, during the past week, of many forms of sin. There is one that I do not think I have named, yet it is perhaps the commonest of all. It is the sin of

waste—soul-waste. Let me relate an incident, and you will see at once what I mean. It happened on a certain day that Judas looked upon a beautiful act of love and devotion. He saw a woman, in the abandonment of her tenderness for Christ, take a box of ointment, which was very precious, and break it over the feet of Jesus. And Judas said, “Why this waste?” All that beautiful piety of Mary and all her love were to this man so much misapplied emotion. And later on Jesus is seated at the Last Supper, and He has something to say to Judas, and this is what He said: “I have kept those whom Thou hast given Me, and none of them is lost but the son of waste—the son of perdition,” and that was Judas. Oh, think of the infinite irony and tragedy of the words! This man, so keen in his business instincts, thought that act of Mary’s pure emotion a form of waste, and he himself is the very son of waste, whose own soul is wasted away for the lack of that very emotion which Mary had. Business men, look into your own hearts. Tell me, truthfully, is there nothing in the story which makes it something of a parable and a warning for you? You have ceased to go to church; you have your Sunday golf, your Sunday dinner parties; you grudge a single dollar given to Christ, a single hour given to public worship. Oh, do you not see that your own

souls are wasting for lack of religion? It is possible that for some of you there is an inherited instinct of morality which will hold you steadfast in right-doing for a long time to come, but inherited instinct will not suffice for your children. They will grow up with dwarfed souls, with spiritual instincts wholly undeveloped, and the day may come when their shame will break your heart. And even in yourself the symptoms of a wasted soul will grow more manifest with time. Look back through the years and compare yourself to-day with what you were twenty years ago, when you went to church. Have you not cause to say: "It was better with me then than it is now"? for you are richer in sordid wealth but poorer in all else, and you know it. It may be that Christ will have to say to you poor rich men what He said about Judas: "Thou hast wasted thyself, and what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

And then we see that religion was for Joshua an impulse to heroism, and this truth lifts the whole matter into a national question. I need not remind you that there have been periods in the history of my own country when heroism has been called for, and when that flame of heroism has been kindled at the altar of the Lord; it is a thing that has happened again and again. In spite of all that may be said, and much that may

be said justly, about the imperfections of religious men, I nevertheless believe that, taking man for man, you will find a higher type of character in the Church of Christ than anywhere else. Carlyle thought so—and he was not a soft-hearted or lenient critic—when at the end of his life he says that the best of the religious people he had known were the best people he had known anywhere, and that is the justification of the Church. It is not in vain that Joshua goes into the temple. It is not rant and cant and fustian that is found there; oh, no, it is those serious thoughts which give gravity to character and those profound truths which impose restraint on conduct, and finally, those Divine principles which produce heroism and equip men for the highest service of their race.

And now I put it to you, and I put it especially to the great crowd of young men here this morning, whether it is not after all a fine thing that is said about Joshua: “A young man who departed not from the tabernacle”? I put it to you whether that is a cause for ridicule or praise? I put it to you whether it is not a more admirable trait in a young man’s character that he should nurture his mind in the serious thoughts of the sanctuary than that he should care for nothing in life above the banalities of the music-hall, or the odds upon a race, or the passion for sport, or the sordid pursuit of

wealth? For my part I think we have no reason to be ashamed of the sons of the tabernacle. I never see a little grey conventicle upon the hill-side in my own country without a vivid sense of all that it has done for the people: for it is from these humble doors of the conventicle, the meeting-house, the chapel, in little places, that many a hero has come out to fight the good fight of liberty and righteousness for the people. And when some great crisis arises and some great demand is made upon manhood, it will be still upon the tabernacle that the nation will have to depend for help. The sons of the tabernacle! Why, they include such glorious names as Gladstone and Gordon, and Wilberforce and Buxton, Sir John Lawrence and Havelock—to quote only a few out of England's biography, and to say nothing of your own great crowd of men who came from the temple of the Lord to serve and deliver the nation.

Is there not enough in the mere mention of such names to make us understand that all that is most memorable in history and human achievement has its origin in religion? There is no more significant putting of that truth than the admirable phrase which Lord Rosebery has applied to Cromwell. He says that Cromwell was the most formidable combination of human qualities known in history, because he was a combination of the religious mystic and the man

of action. Sons of the tabernacle! That is too proud and too sacred a distinction to be disposed of by mere irony and ridicule. A little while ago a friend of mine told me that he went into a church which had one tradition and only one. It was in the pulpit of that church that a great preacher breathed his last breath as he was preaching, and my friend thought he would like to see the church, and went in. He sat there in an empty pew, when presently he was startled by the sound of quiet sobbing and what seemed like a pleading voice, and he went down the aisle almost trembling, to discover whence came this sound that thrilled him. He found in the pulpit a youth who was the son of the man who had died in the pulpit. He had come to the church that afternoon by a singular accident, that he might stand in the pulpit where his father died, and there he was, on his knees, sobbing before his God and praying for grace that he might follow his father's God. You have no memory quite as poignant as that, it may be, but there are many of you here who have fathers who have passed into the skies. You know well what made your father the man he was and your mother the woman she was: it was their piety. And to their piety, to their sense of duty and reverence for God, you owe all the best qualities and forces found in your own life and character to-day. Come back to



your father's God, young man. Say: "My father's God, I will exalt Him." And let the God of your father be your God too.

My mind goes back to the little town of Nazareth, which, we are told, was noted for its wickedness, and there grew up the most perfect of all lives. We know nothing of that life for thirty years, but the whole biography of Jesus for thirty years is to be found in a single sentence: "He went into the synagogue as His custom was." Jesus also was a Son of the Tabernacle. It is the tabernacle which explains the character which even to the sceptic is the greatest and purest character the world has ever known; and if Jesus needed to go into the synagogue, if it was His custom, think you, young men, living amid the temptations of these great cities, you can keep yourselves pure and make yourselves valiant without going into the temple of your God?

And so, if I may hazard one last suggestion to you, I will say this: If you are coming into the Church, bring to it your manliness, not your unmanliness. The Church wants your strength, not your weakness. Religion may be a cheap thing, the cheapest thing in the world, and the meanest thing in the world; and religion may be the greatest thing in the world, and the noblest. Therefore bring your entire manhood to the toil of religion, for religion

needs it all. Give yourself wholly to the Lord and consecrate yourself unto Him. Say: "As for me and my house, I will serve the Lord." May God give us grace to make the vow here in the presence of God's people, and may the vow made this day in Plymouth Church be ratified in heaven when we gather with the whole family of God in the Church of the firstborn.

## XI

### THE SEASONS OF THE SOUL

*(Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, Sunday Evening, November 20th.)*

**M**Y subject is "The Seasons of the Soul," and the passages on which I shall base my address are these: "Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their season" (Jer. viii. 7). "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. viii. 20).

What is the thought in the mind of Jeremiah expressed in these two passages? At first it seems disconnected, but as you examine it there is a very clear thread of thought discernible. Jeremiah, like all poets and prophets of the Hebrew race, is a close observer of Nature, and in one of his reveries he had noticed one of the most astonishing things in Nature—the migration of the birds. I also have seen it—the assembly of vast hosts of birds in the autumn of the year, as by some mystic signal; their or-

ganised flight—for there is not the least doubt that it is organised; their movement in ranks and orders, under the visible direction of winged captains and guides; and then the tremendous journey from English fields to African deserts, poised at a height higher than the Himalayas, and moving at a speed beside which our most extravagant ideas of speed are paltry. That is the sign of the closing summer, just as the return of these exiles of the air is the sign of returning spring. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times and the wise swallow observes her times, for they hear the whisper of their Creator, and know the time of their visitation, and respond to it.

But not so man, and there is that which makes the thoughts of Jeremiah sad and bitter. The summer ends, and the harvest passes, but man wings no flight to the sunny climes of God. For him also there is a season and a time, but he observes it not. The mystic signals of God's will are despised, and then it is that the late and lingering bird is caught in the sudden grip of winter, and the arrow of the frost pierces the foolish heart, and maims the wings that will fly no more. The harvest is past, and we are not saved. The soul sits in frozen silence, and has no longer strength for flight. Man does not recognise his spiritual season, and over the autumn fields of life wails the low moan of once

heedless and now lost souls, "The summer is ended, the harvest is past, and we are not saved."

Here, then, is a great truth: that the soul of man has its appointed time of salvation, just as the earth has its seasons. There is something seasonal in the spiritual experiences of men. Have you never observed it? Have you never marked in yourselves times when a spring wind seems to blow through the heart, and all within you is tender and softened as by the dew of God, and times when there is dulness in your members, and all your inner life seems congealed?

Have we not had a sense of Divine visitations and withdrawals, a consciousness of Divine influences which play upon us and permeate us? In the very phrases of Scriptures so much is taught us. The Holy Spirit is the wind of God breathing over the soul, the soft spring wind at which the earth wakens and is renewed, the wind that, passing through us, begets fertility and beauty. There are few of us that do not sometimes feel that in some mysterious way our life is knit up with the life of the earth. We are of the earth earthy. The spring gladdens us, the autumn saddens us. There seems to be an actual quickening in our members when once more the sap stirs in the tree, and all the world is growing and blowing. There seems to be an

actual slowing of the wheels and pulses of life as the year runs down, and an imperious arrest is put upon the life of the earth. This poet-preacher of Jerusalem would also remind us that we are also of the heaven heavenly. Our life is also knit up with vast spiritual forces, which from time to time thrill and throb through us. The soul has its seasons as the earth has; seasons when God is near, when goodness is easy and alluring; when all that is good in us is drawn out, and the seeds of truth quicken in the interstices of the soul, and the green blade of the heavenly sower springs up with its promise of a hundred-fold harvest. Have you not known such seasons? Have you not felt and caught for an instant the radiance and warmth of that Sun of Righteousness who is the centre of all the solar system of the spirit?

The soul has its seasons, its appointed times, and about them there are three things to be noticed.

I. You cannot command them. They are given.

II. You can use them.

III. You can miss them.

First observe the fact—this play of outside forces upon us, as little to be commanded as the seasons. Think for a moment of your bodies; are there not outside forces here, for ever play-



ing on us? For instance, who knows by what minute vibrations of the air and arrangements of cause and effect the body is kept in health, the nerves are exalted or depressed? A thousand forces play upon us every instant. We are the centres of a vast mesh of sensitiveness, and the slender threads, like the threads of a gossamer web, run out into the very depth of the infinite. The astrologist's thought that there are sweet influences in the Pleiades and that the stars affect us was not wholly a vain thought. Sounds, thrilling unsought in the porches of the ear; visions, painted for an instant on the retina of the eye; odours, and fragrances, and flavours all affect us; and not our body only, but, through our physical senses, our thought, our imagination, our mind, our will. If we are thus affected by the earthly, is it foolish to suppose that we are equally affected by the heavenly? If the body, placed in this mysterious world, responds so sensitively to all physical influences, is there not ample justification for this truth that the soul also has its seasons, its sense of God, its consciousness of a Divine visitation, and of a mystic intimacy with the Supreme?

Think of it again from another point of view. There is a thing in the world called genius, but no man has ever yet told us what it is, or ever will. All that men have succeeded in telling us

is what it is not. They have told us that it is not talent, that it cannot be acquired, that it cannot be commanded. It is not found in many a great scholar whose name is the pride of his university; it is found in the son of a stable-keeper in Moorfield, called John Keats. It is not found in generations of bishops, learned, eloquent, and scholarly; it is found, and shines like a crown of flame on the brow of a youth called George Whitfield. Those who have possessed it give no better account of the matter; but in this they all agree, it is something, not themselves, which is literally and truly given them. Milton knows that he cannot write poetry till the right hour comes, and he lies awake at night, praying for the visitation. George Eliot, utterly dissimilar from Milton at so many points, yet is one with him here; she feels that her writings are given her, that she is the vehicle of some higher power, that she is commanded by it, but does not command it: that she must needs wait for the visitation without which her mind is but an empty temple. Now I ask you, is there not something in such testimonies as these which is very remarkable? Do they not all agree in one astounding assertion, that the mind of a great thinker never does its noblest work, never touches the supreme height we call genius, except when it is visited by some higher power, and that then its message is not

born in its own depths, and of its own will, but is literally and truly given it?

In the world of the intellect we have our name for this astounding phenomenon; is there any corresponding fact and corresponding word for it in the spiritual world? Yes; the corresponding fact is the Divine visitation of God which all human souls may feel, and the name for it is grace. The highest thoughts, the truest impulses of soul, come to us unbidden. What is it that teaches the bird to know the hour of its migration? You cannot tell me. You can give it a name and call it instinct, just as you call the contact of the mind of the great poet with the mind of the universe, genius, and its product inspiration. But these are only names. The inexplicable thing is this: that the mind which made the universe does utter itself to the bird of the air, in a secret prompting, a kind of grace, interposing for its salvation.

Think, then, of whether or not that same grace is not found in our lives. Have not we known it, that thrill of soul, that mystic quickening, that sudden gracious sensitiveness, which makes us aware of God? We cannot explain how or whence it came. One of our great writers, Mark Rutherford, has told us that he once saw for an instant a woman's face in the street, so full of peace and stillness that he understood in that moment for the first time the

truth of the Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Incarnation in a woman's face! Even so, for the grace and revelation of God may draw near to us by many avenues that seem to our poor knowledge to have no relation with religion.

The vision or the voice may have come to you as you sat in the counting-house or the office, as you closed a book that had interested you, as you heard a strain of music in the street, as you sat alone in your house at night, as you looked on the sea and mountain with a joy in the beauty of the world, or as you faced the dark hour, and heard the weeping in the chamber of the dead, and felt that your life was falling round you in ruin; but it was always something outside yourself, something given. A moment ago your heart was cold and hard; now it is warmed and softened. It is as though the angels had been with you, as though a curtain had been lifted and you saw for an instant an awful and consoling vision. Something has thrilled in you, some secret, sensitive fibre, that was neither of the mind nor body. And you have been mystically gladdened, purged, helped, directed, comforted. By what name do you call this visitation? God's name for it is grace. The grace of God fills the world: and as that truly spiritual and noble writer, Robert Louis Stevenson, has put it, "We walk upon it, we

breathe it: we live and die by it; it makes the nails and axles of the universe." It flows into a man's heart silently, it opens on a man's life like a great soundless sunrise. We who thought ourselves alone find that we are not alone. God is working on our souls all the time, even as sun and wind and weather are always working on the earth, producing the dear, sweet spring and the time of ingathering and harvest. You remember how Wordsworth asks of Nature—

"Think you mid all this mighty sum  
Of things for ever speaking,  
That nothing of itself will come,  
But we must still be seeking?"

The soul puts the same question to God, and God's answer is: "I was found of them that sought Me not, I was made manifest to them that asked not after Me"; for this is the first lesson of grace: you cannot command it, and yet it comes.

That is the first fact, then, and it is amply attested. Now notice the second thing—the grace of God visits us, that we may use the grace.

The stork knoweth her appointed times; and knowledge means action. She perceives the mystic signal, and instantly obeys it. She gazes into the measureless void, and though she sees no path there, she knows there is a path,

and knows that God has called her, and makes haste to spread her wings for flight.

But here begins the tragedy of man; though he has spiritual intuitions of equal certainty he does not act upon them. How many men do we meet in every walk of life who seem to have great powers which have yielded no commensurate result—the men of whom Oliver Wendell Holmes speaks so pathetically as those who “die with all their music in them”? Why is it? In the main I believe it to be for want of response to opportunity, for want of effort. Even so: what thousands of men do receive God’s spiritual vision, God’s intimation of grace, but they are too timid, too careless, to seize the vision and interpret it. It came once, twice, thrice. They saw it, felt it, thrilled to it, and said, “To-morrow I will go and work in the vineyard.” But God does not deal in to-morrows: His word is, “*To-day* if ye will hear My voice harden not your hearts.” The message is imperative; it has no future tense, it is now or never. There were many men who knew Christ in the flesh, and might have told us much about Him that we do not know, so many that St. John says that he supposes even the world itself could not contain the books that might have been written. The men who might have written them died, and gave no sign. They took with them to the grave all those



gracious unrecorded words of Christ, all the memories of His face, His voice, His deeds; and how much poorer is the world to-day! No, God insists on promptitude in any man to whom He commits His message. There must be no debate, no delay, no hesitation. Now is the accepted time, for it is the only acceptable time. Not to use it, not to profit by the message, is as good as never to have had it. For what is salvation? It is the appropriation of God's grace. Is there any man who has not something to be saved from? Is there any man who is not given an opportunity of being saved? Surely not. The man most completely trained in morality and virtue, most impeccable in conduct and lofty thought, has something to be saved from. It is perhaps vanity, Pharisaism, selfishness, some bitter harshness of temper, some flaw of the spirit; or it may be, though no one knows it but himself, some secret vehemence of fleshly passion, some poisonous corruption of his thought, some pursuing and mocking demon of unclean imagination. Ask him when he is alone if there is nothing he needs to be saved from? And if he knows himself he will reply, "Yes indeed, for the things I would not do, these I do; and the things I would, these I do not; who shall deliver me from this body of death?" And as for the man who is not good, not virtuous, not upright,

we know that he needs saving, and so does he; for is he not visibly flying from the troop of devils who press upon his heels and drive him down the steep place into the sea? What, then, is salvation for these men, who seem to stand so far apart, and yet are so close together in their innermost experiences? It is simply the appropriation of God's grace.

“I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,” said St. Paul; and the whole science of salvation lies in that sentence. For, think of it, how easy to have been disobedient! What was there in all that happened to Paul that day upon the Damascus road that might not have been explained away by a little ratiocination? A voice, a shock, a flash of blinding light—call it sunstroke, earthquake, epilepsy—a subtle mind could find many names for it. But subtle as the mind of Paul was, here was something which he well knew lay outside the mind. He knew his season. No force of argument or casuistry could drive him from the obstinate conviction that Jesus had indeed spoken to him from the heavens. Grace had met him, and he knew it. And as I look into the pages of human experience, I find a thousand stories to corroborate Paul's story. A young girl listens to a strange preacher in a Norwich meeting-house, and weeps, she scarce knows why; grace had met her that day, and all the world reveres the

name of Elizabeth Fry. A wild seaman, in the depth of his sin, hears the appealing voice of Jesus; his name is John Newton, and it is he who writes the sweetest hymn upon the grace of God the world possesses. And the secret in each case is the same; grace met Saul of Tarsus, and Elizabeth Fry, and John Newton, but each appropriated the grace. They were not disobedient—they knew, and what is more, they *observed* their season.

The stork knoweth her seasons and observes them. There is a Divine grace for the birds of the air, the call of instinct which makes for salvation. Man also has the call of grace, and salvation is the response to the call, the appropriation of the Divine grace.

“ Oh,” but you say, “ what about the man who never gets the call, never gets a chance? ” My brothers, I have heard of that man many times, but I have never met him. Is God more careful of the birds of the air than of man? “ Verily I say unto you, ye are of more value than many sparrows,” says Jesus. All men share God’s sunshine, and all men are sharers also of God’s grace. Mean and vile as the worst may be, there are nevertheless moments, hours, seasons of visitation even for him; promptings of tenderness, and purity, and magnanimity, a gracious touch that softens the hard heart and subdues the cruel temper, a

voice prompting him to flee from the wrath to come and seek the far-off realms of heavenly sunlight.

And so I say boldly I have not yet met the man who has had no chance of redemption. I say that if a man, the saddest and most miserable of human wrecks, should come to me and say, "Sir, I never had a chance," I for one should not believe him. Never had a chance, sir? Was there no morning when you woke after some night of sin and longed to be an innocent child again, and was not that a chance? Has no one in all your long descent to ruin put out a hand to you, and trusted you, and was not that a chance? In that hour when you hung yonder on the rail of the ferry-boat, and looked on the black water, and gathered yourself together for the final leap into oblivion, did not some mystic hand arrest you, and was not that a chance? Were you never ill, and did you not get well again, have you never once felt your soul softened, your mind awed, your heart touched by a desire for goodness? You have not had a chance? Sir, it is not true. You have had many chances. Yes, and let me add, you have one more even now, for even now Christ is looking into your eyes, and calling you, and this is the day of salvation.

And so we come to the most tragic truth of all—we may miss the season of God's grace.

Picture to yourself what would happen to the bird if it missed the appointed hour of its migration. Yonder soars the winged army, and the air is full of imperious call and summons. It wheels and lingers in the sunset, but this one foolish creature still hangs back. Then at last the great host begins to move southwards, and silence falls upon empty fields. The sun shines next day, but with diminished beam, and this foolish creature is not afraid. And then some night the autumn storm bursts upon the reaped fields, and after that comes the stringent frost, and then the deep snow, and the shepherd on the hills finds in the snow a little dead bird, starved and frozen—it has missed the hour of its migration. Can we doubt that that is also a picture of things in human life? Why, we have seen dynasties overthrown and the destiny of nations altered by a single hour's delay in some great crisis. We have seen in our streets the forlorn descendants of kings, kings who have missed their hour, and knew not the day of their visitation. We see men every day missing great opportunities, opportunities clear enough to all but themselves, which they do not perceive through indolence, or inattention, or mere carelessness. If they see at all, they see only when the hour is past. Can we hide from ourselves the truth that in the same way men do miss the seasons of God's

grace? Is it not possible to resist the Spirit, to repulse the heavenly Prompter, to dismiss the warning impulse? I am not applying the narrow arithmetic of sectarian theology to men's chances of salvation. I decline to speculate on human futures. I do not know how far the magnanimity of God may go; I only know that His thoughts are as high above our thoughts as the heavens are high above the earth. I cannot imagine any man, translated into the realm of the eternities, whose very conception implies limitlessness, quite coming to his last chance; nor can I pierce the hereafter to know where that last chance is set, even if there be such an awful hour of finality. But this I know, that here, and within the limits of this world, we do see men miss their last chances. We do see them refuse the grace of God, and count themselves unworthy of eternal life. They live, they die, and from first to last they have never appropriated the grace of God; they have refused the toils of the Spirit, and have let their hearts run to waste; and the seasons of God visit them in vain.

Oh, my brothers, I implore you to think of these things. I speak with twenty-five years of public ministry behind me. I have seen marvellous conversions, and I have seen also many lives go down, their bright promise extinguished, their early hopes dimmed, not only by



the tragedy of vice, but by the far commoner tragedy of neglected good. It fills me with a kind of terror to think of the thousands upon thousands I have addressed, and to remember how few have given me any outward sign that the truth I have spoken was indeed the truth to them. And therefore my last appeal to you is for some definite open sign that you accept the call of God. I appeal to you for instant decision. Don't wait, don't doubt, don't linger. Observe the season, and settle things with God now. And I plead with you to do this, lest for you the hour should come (which God forbid) when you will wake from your dream of folly to utter this bitterest of all cries: "Behold, the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved."

## XII

### SELF-RESERVATION

*(Yale University, Sunday Morning, November 6th.)*

“Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place thou seest.”—DEUT. xii. 13.

THIS is a strange counsel, and we can judge its intention rightly by allowing the imagination to reconstruct the picture of the circumstances under which it was uttered. The Israelites are about to enter on the land which God has given them, and it is easy to understand the solemn jubilation of their temper. What can be more natural than that they should be eager to offer their burnt offerings on every altar that they see? Here at the roadside, on the mountain path, wherever they turn, are the shrines and altars ready for them, as in Catholic countries one sees the shrine and the Cross at every turn of the road. Is it not the evidence of a devout spirit that the host shall halt at these wayside altars, and seize the opportunity of sacrificing to God? The reply of Moses is that such sacrifices are not so much an evidence of devoutness as of

shallowness of spiritual feeling. The impulse that governs them is too easily stirred to be deeply reverential; there is a facile formality about it which savours of the old idolatry. One can fancy something of light-hearted and frivolous feeling in these chance sacrifices; as if a man should say, "Lo, here is an altar—let us sacrifice," with no shrinking sense of the nearness of God, and of the unspeakable awfulness of Him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. Sacrifice to God—the earthly function by which the soul draws near to its Maker—is so solemn a thing that it is only to be attempted at solemn moments and in a solemn spirit, and hence the counsel, "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place thou seest," is a counsel which implies a real and deep spiritual preparation for spiritual acts—a doctrine of self-reservation and self-reticence in the presence of the Eternal.

It means also another thing: God's jealousy of idolatry. In the old Talmudic stories of Abram there is one that is deeply significant of man's innate tendency to idolatry. Abram, who has declared to Nimrod that he cannot worship fire, because it can be quenched by water, nor water, because it can be driven away in the form of clouds by the wind, at last one day, when he sees the sun rise across the desert, is so overwhelmed with the magnificence of the spectacle

that he says: " Surely the sun is God, the Creator, and this will I worship! " But the sun sets, and Abram says: " God does not set, and I cannot worship the sun. " But when the moon and the stars arise out of the East, again his soul is thrilled with the glory of the heavens, and he says: " The moon surely is the very face of God, and before it I may kneel! " But the moon and the stars set, and once more the sun appears, whereupon he says: " Verily, these heavenly bodies are no gods, for they obey law; I will worship Him whose law they obey. " There is such an idolatrous tendency in us all, for it is hidden in the core of human nature itself, and we do not all rise above it as Abram did. We are all ready to worship the creature instead of the Creator; to disperse our feelings of reverence on inferior objects; to adore men in exalted hero-worship, and Nature in ecstatic Pantheism; to be now of the temper of Carlyle, now of the temper of Wordsworth; but, high and reverent as such a temper may be, we may forget God in our worship. Man we may admire and love; Nature we may reverence and commune with; but these are after all but roadside altars for the soul. We may dissipate on them the fund of religious feelings which should be reserved for God alone. We may spend our faculties of worship on the lower object and have no reverence left for the higher; worship-

ping the sun, the moon, and the stars, as Abram did, and failing to worship God. Therefore, the counsel holds good for ever, "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest."

The story suggests, then, a certain high vocation which exists in human life, and our duty of reserving ourselves for it. You know how Christ said to St. Peter, "Follow Me, and I will make you a fisher of men"; and, rough and ignorant as Peter was, yet he had grace and vision to recognise the higher vocation and follow it. You know also how Christ put the same vocation before the young ruler, and, cultured and accomplished as he was, yet he neglected the vocation and did not follow Christ. The same choice is presented to us all, and the most pitiable thing in human life is that men constantly refuse the higher vocation and follow the lower. And they do more and worse than this: they spend the whole strength of their being on the lower. The energy that might make them public benefactors they spend to accumulate private fortunes; they choose wealth, not heroism; luxury, not sainthood; and they pour out all the treasure of mind and heart to purchase that which is not bread, whose reward satisfieth not. I speak, no doubt, to many whose hearts are filled with the natural ambition of youth to succeed in life; will you believe me if I tell you that

my experience is that the only real happiness in life is the joy of being good and doing good? Will you bear with me when I tell you that to spend all the best energy of your mind and heart on earthly success is a profanation of yourself, a sacrilege of your own soul? Offer not the gift of yourself on every wayside altar—reserve the best of yourself for God. The higher vocation salutes you, the altar of God awaits you; reserve yourself for that.

What would it have mattered, we are perhaps inclined to ask, if the Israelites had sacrificed upon these ready-made altars of the old heathenism? It would surely have done them no harm to have performed an act that was clearly a grateful and a pious act. Ah! but there was harm—the harm of self-dispersal. Faith may be too facile, feeling too fluent. There is a certain chastity of the emotions that is not to be lightly unveiled. It is not the man with whom speech is readiest who feels most, not the man most susceptible to the æstheticism of worship who brings to God the trembling rapture that has deeps in it, and profundities, and sacred secrecies. I think I know why it was when Christ called Peter he obeyed instantly; it was because he had unconsciously reserved himself for that hour. There had been no dispersal of self, no running hither or thither after this or that popular voice of the hour; alone on the Galilean



lake, under the starry sky, the deep heart of the man had yearned for a Christ, and when the Christ spoke, all that mighty heart went out to Him. And I think I know why it was that the rich young ruler did not obey the call of Christ; there had been too great a dispersal of self in a life that had many interests, and he was not simple enough to act as Peter did. For the greatest acts of life we need the unflawed wholeness of a heart that has not been tampered with; therefore offer not thy burnt offerings on every altar which thou seest.

Who that has taken any interest in literature is not familiar with the sad spectacle of a certain dispersal of self which has often gone on in the lives of men of genius, and has been their ruin? The truly great writer is he who most accurately measures the nature of his gift and guards it with the most sacred vigilance. Such a man does his work in that spirit of sacredness which animated Milton when he prayed for the Holy Ghost to move his mind to utterance, and Wordsworth when he said that vows were made for him, and that he knew himself consecrate to poetry. Such a man will not permit himself to do anything less than his best. He works with a high ideal, and puts his finest conscience into all that he does. So far as the bulk of his work goes, it may be little or much, but no man can say of it that its least part is done with

wilful slovenliness or indifference to the highest ideals. He toils in the same scrupulous spirit as those great mediæval artists who fashioned those parts of their work which would be least observed, and which indeed would never be seen at all, with the same perfect finish and fidelity as those which they knew would stand in the full glare of a critical publicity. Such men reserve themselves; they attain their greatness by the concentration, and not the dispersion, of power; they would rather do one thing perfectly than a dozen things with only a fair measure of success. In the race for fame scores of men pass them, but they take no notice. They know that in the long run only the perfect thing endures, and they despise the "loud impertinence" of a day's fleeting notoriety for the sake of that higher prize of immortality which they covet. They sacrifice not on every altar that they see, but reserve themselves for that one highest thing which they can do the best.

But suppose your man of genius does not work in this spirit, what happens? He is seduced by the wayside altar, and never reaches the temple of fame, which is the holiest and highest of all. He succumbs to the importunity of magazine editors, and does scamped and paltry work for money. The pathway to the highest is difficult, and it is strewn with the bones of those who have failed; the roadside altar

stands close at hand, and there an immediate reward is to be found. He argues that if people are ready to buy his inferior work, and to praise it, he would be criminally foolish not to conciliate their humour. He becomes a literary hack; he ceases to be a man of genius. For nothing is surer than this: that he who withdraws his ambition from the highest things and palters with his literary conscience, and works for immediate reward rather than for the highest reward of knowing that he has written nothing that is not his best, soon finds that his general standard of excellence declines, and his power of achieving the highest thing diminishes. This is an open lesson, and one that is written large upon the literature of our day. Would it not have been infinitely better for the work of Dickens if he had shunned what he himself called the "garish lights" of the reciter's platform, and had worked on in calm and patience, perfecting his art? Who does not feel that there was something contemptible in that insane desire for money and histrionic publicity which led him to forsake the quiet library, where alone his true work could be done, and go on with his readings, even when he knew that they were killing him? Would not he himself have found a far deeper joy in producing one more perfect work, which would have been the ripe expression of his genius, than in all

those frantic plaudits of the crowd, "hollow, and restless, and loud"? But he sacrificed at the wayside altar, and the sacrifice he laid upon the altar was his own genius. The money he coveted was made, but the perfect book could not be written; the actor thrived, but the artist died. He did in this form what multitudes have done, and are doing in similar or other forms: gained the world at the price of himself. Assuredly to the man of genius—poet, artist, author—there can be no more searching word than the ancient counsel of Moses, "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest."

The same spectacle meets us in that great whirl of incessant activities in which so many of us are involved to-day. There are men and women who have a sort of craze for versatility. They sit upon every sort of committee, attend every sort of meeting, speak on every sort of subject. They are reservoirs of fluent rhetoric, which they are ready to dispense at any moment, on any theme. Their minds are cabinets of portable opinions, which they can produce at the shortest call. They would think that something was seriously amiss with their souls, and count the day ill spent, if they were not perpetually hurrying from engagement to engagement. The weekly diaries of their industry are appalling documents. They are good men,

well-meaning men, industrious men; but after all their lives are a failure. And why? Because they have never learnt to practice a self-respecting reserve over themselves. One vehement conviction would carry them to a far nobler form of usefulness than all this fecundity of mere opinion. One cause that should absorb their utmost energy, that should fire and stir them into vehement enthusiasm, that should be for them the great purpose of all their living, would do more to mould their characters into heroism, than all this glib advocacy of innumerable causes which have never really moved them. Such men carry no weight. When they speak they never cleave the mark as does the master-bowman. The best that men ever say of them is, "Oh, put Mr. So-and-So on the committee; he's a useful sort of man, and can't do any harm." They are the mere utility men of parties and movements, to whom no one would think of entrusting the part of the great actor. And so they sacrifice upon the wayside altar, and waste themselves upon a multiplicity of objects; for as the world is ordered to-day, it is the specialist alone whose word carries weight, and the specialist is one who has concentrated himself upon one supreme aim, and reserved himself for one sacred and engrossing devotion.

Such illustrations as these lie upon the out-



side of things; but the lesson becomes still more searching as we approach the moral and spiritual sphere. How pertinently does it apply, for example, to those affections which inhabit all human hearts and have so much to do with the determination of human destiny. Probably the most important of all questions for the youth who stands at the threshold of manhood is how he is going to treat that fund of affection which is in his heart and craves a corresponding affection. It is part of the unhappy cynicism of our day to jest at love and marriage; but if we think of them rightly and nobly we shall see that they are the greatest facts in life. The best men have always held them to be so, and there is something almost awe-inspiring as well as beautiful in the intensity of that passion of love which has animated the best men and women. The love of Dante, of Tennyson, of Kingsley, for the women who were all in all to them, is one of the divinest facts in human history, and one that has never failed to move the hearts of men. But why was it these men loved so intensely? How was it that this divine flame, which is so often dulled in the gross atmosphere of the world, burned in them with such purity and brightness? It was because they kept it intense by never dissipating it on unworthy fancies. They had not sacrificed on the wayside altar; they had reserved themselves for the



great sacramental hour of a true and enduring passion. When they came to the true altar and the true temple, they brought to it hearts whose virginal freshness and depth of feeling had never been dulled or frittered, and the offering they laid upon the altar had no blemish. But with how many men and women is the very reverse true? They do not reserve themselves: they pour out the precious spikenard of the heart on unworthy feet; they lose the first freshness and intensity of feeling for want of that self-reverence which sets a seal upon the heart and keeps it unsullied and serene; and then, when the true hour of love comes, they have not the power of loving nobly, and the hour finds them unready and strikes in vain. Do not suppose that I am now touching upon one of the sentimental themes which are well enough for the novelist but out of place in the pulpit; I say that love is a very serious thing, a divine thing, an awful and a beautiful thing, and that the worst tragedies of life arise from our misuse of it. To men and women alike this doctrine of self-reservation applies; and as we practise it we shall find the true divineness of love; as we fail in it we shall miss that rare and noble joy of affection which moves us so in such lives as Tennyson's and Kingsley's. "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest." Don't

waste yourself on those shallow indulgences of affection which leave the soul sterile, the heart empty. Reserve yourself, lest when you come to the true temple of love you have no offering, because it has been left upon the wayside altar.

It is but looking at the same picture with a certain deepening of the shadows when I speak of those actually evil indulgences which stain the lives of men, and are in truth a hideous profanation of life at the wayside altar. We all know the popular theory about the sowing of wild oats, a theory of which we hear less to-day than once we did, because the stern angel of science has crossed our path and frightened us, and made us understand that even wild oats spring up and must be harvested. But it is not to that side of the case that I allude. The wild oats may or may not be harvested by the ruthless hands of heredity—we know that even heredity is not automatically just in its punishments. But the main error that underlies the wild oats theory is surely this: that we assume that a man may squander purity and still have enough of pure passion left in him to realise an intense and noble love; that he may sacrifice at the wayside altars of the goddess of lubricity, and still be able to offer himself as a whole and blameless worshipper at the true divine altar of love; that after sacrificing at every altar he sees through a profligate youth, he may ascend the

very hill of God and find there what a Dante found, or a Kingsley. He cannot; he never will. The stain of the wayside altar is on him, and its leprosy will cleave to him for ever. It is a soul-stain; it is a thought-leprosy. He can bring to the great sacramental hour of life only a wasted heart. He has already poured out the true sacramental wine of life upon the wayside altar, and his heart is no longer whole, his feelings are no longer intense and fresh. Diminished power of feeling, obstinate incapacity for loving in any great and noble way, the desire to love as pure men and women love, but without the power—is not that the true Nemesis of the wayside altar, and the most terrible harvesting of a man's wild oats?

Attention was called the other day to what has often struck the student of art—the extraordinary difference in two well-known likenesses of Rembrandt, each painted by himself. They hang in the Louvre, and they tell the tragedy of a life. In the one Rembrandt paints himself as a young man “full of life and courage; and in all the bravery of rich garments; the little moustache is twirled up audaciously, the bright brown eyes are alight with the foreknowledge of victory.” The other picture represents him as somewhere about fifty, prematurely aged; “the dress is untidy, even dirty; an old cloth is on his head, a discoloured

rag round his throat; the moustache dragged; patches of grey hairs grow like sedge round the jaws, and the searching eyes have become intensely sad, darkened, as it were, by the shadow of inevitable death." It is an awful contrast. It is as though the great artist, out of the depth of an unimaginable despair, bade us look on this picture and on that. Before such a spectacle no words are needed; we recall that sad middle period of Rembrandt's life, with its public shame and scandal, and we know that he had sacrificed at the wayside altar. He himself knew it; and it surely must have been in some hour of poignant self-reproach that he took up his brush and with a master hand put upon the canvas that great and terrible lesson of his fall which haunts us by its sadness and its tragedy. Oh, young man, rejoicing in thy strength, "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest." Reserve thyself and guard thy honour as the very fountain of life, for "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control—these three alone lead life to sovereign power."

The youth liable to betrayal through his passions needs this counsel, but the man of steady virtue, toiling for a competence or a fortune, needs it too. The wayside altar may not be the altar of Venus or Ashtoreth, only of Mammon. I may appeal with equal force to you men of

business, whose virtue is secure enough, and say, Are you quite sure that you are not surrendering at the altar of Mammon that part of yourself which belongs to God? I saw the death of a man recorded in the papers recently whose private history I know. He was once a good, humble Christian, a poor man, interested in his Church and loyal to Christ. He became immensely wealthy, almost in a moment, by one sagacious act, and from that hour the wayside altar claimed him. He gave up his Church, he moved away from the humble Christians who had been his dearest friends, he lived in all the worldly pomp of a worldly man who had his portion in this life, and now he is dead, and I wondered, as I read the news, whether in that dying hour he did not look back to those old days when he walked humbly with his God, and say, "It was better with me then than now!" God forbid that I should judge him; but I know that when I come to die the only memory from which I shall expect to gather comfort will be the memory of hours passed at the altar of God. Christ calls each of us to a higher vocation than earthly success, to the service of the Most High, and the service of His creatures, and whatever we may think of that higher vocation now, when life ends we shall see that it was the one vocation worth our effort, the better part which even death cannot take away from us.

And so I come, lastly, to that more exclusively spiritual sphere, in which this counsel finds its highest application. Does it not suggest to us that true spirit of worship without which all worship is vain? The wayside altar may be for us the creed, the religious shibboleth, the ecclesiastical organisation in which we were brought up. Or it may mean the mere form of church-going, which we observe without any real sense of the solemnity of these weekly gatherings for praise or worship. To how many of us is this the real altar of the Highest, for which we reserve our true sacrifices? To how many of us is it a mere wayside altar, where we halt without thought, and which we approach without any true intensity of feeling? Is it not true that we often waste ourselves so completely upon the chance altars of life that it becomes impossible for us to rise into any real elevation of spiritual feeling, or to attempt any great spiritual task?

It is Christ Himself who calls us to this act of reserving ourselves for God, and Christ also is our example. Oh, how wonderful is that self-reservation which characterised the life of Christ! He hears while yet a boy the call of God, and then He returns to Nazareth, and for eighteen years silence covers Him as with a garment. Here is all Judea and Galilee volcanic with suppressed patriotism, all kinds of



movements and crusades of liberty, and stirrings of revolt—not a word from Christ. Why was it? It means that Christ was reserving Himself for His true life-work. He had no strength to spend on the propagandas of an hour; these wayside altars could not seduce Him. His altar was Calvary, and to that He travelled. That was the sacred place where God waited for Him, and He knew it. And so, when the hour struck He was ready; He brought to it a soul fresh, undefiled, unwasted, and became the very Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world.

Calvary also is the altar where God awaits us. The one divine sacrifice is the sacrifice of ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, and it is our reasonable service. Men talk of the pain of renouncing the world for Christ; ah, far more terrible is that renunciation of Christ for the world which leaves men at last wailing with the dying Paracelsus—

“Love, hope, fear, faith, these make humanity,  
These are its sign, and note, and character,  
And these I have lost.”

For to lose Christ is to lose ourselves; and to find Christ is to find both ourselves and Christ. Oh, heedless soul, seest not thou how thou misusest both thyself and thy Master, when thou givest to the world what was meant

for God? Let the wayside altar no longer hold thy feet from following Him, who waits for thee at the altar of the Cross. To live for Christ, to walk in His light, to love and serve our fellow-creatures for His sake, this is life indeed; and let our prayer be the prayer of the old mystic poet—

“O King of kings, give me such strength  
In this great war depending,  
That I may here prevail at length,  
And ever be ascending,  
Till I at last arrive to Thee  
The Source of all felicity.”

### XIII

#### SAVING FAITH

I WISH to speak of the greatest of all Christian ethics, the saving power of belief, and the passages on which I shall base my address are these: "Jesus saith unto her, He that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die" (John xi. 25). "And He saith unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved: but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark xvi. 15). Salvation by faith is the greatest of all Christian ethics; it is also the most novel and original. There can be no doubt that Christ put it in the forefront of all His teaching. The two passages I have quoted are cardinal instances. To Martha He boldly says that belief is life; he that believes has become possessed of a new principle of life, by virtue of which he enters on a new scale of being, and shall never die. To His disciples He entrusts the principle of belief as the great secret He has to communicate to the world: he that believes

shall be saved, and he that disbelieves shall be condemned. Faith thus becomes the watchword of the new religion. A new decalogue of duties is declared, a new type of heroism is set up: but of all duty and all heroism faith is the root. It is this that lifts Christianity out of the category of the philosophies; it is not a philosophy but a life, a life of faith upon the Son of God. It is this which has been the secret of its conquest; it appeals to a faculty in human nature, not new but forgotten, the faculty of faith.

There are three tendencies in the thought of our own time, to which I will briefly allude because they give vital interest to this theme.

First, there is the apparent indifference to religion. I say *apparent* indifference, for I am by no means sure that it is a real and reasoned indifference. Men often obey a certain drift of thought and conduct, without acquiescing in it, and indeed without thinking much about it. The true reason for the neglect of public worship may be rather an objection to the form of worship than a real deadness of feeling toward religion itself. Men may turn from the Church without turning from Christ, and often they do so upon a right instinct, because the Church is no longer the true representative of Christ. Nevertheless even an apparent indifference to religion can scarcely exist without some radical decay of religious belief. It is possible that the

decay of belief is the result of the indifference to the means of religion. The religious instinct is not nourished. The Christian teachers who speak with authority are few. The grave and thrilling spectacle of lives lived in the full spirit of Christian heroism is not common. More and more, as the spirit of Mammon eats into the age, men lose the habit of living in intimacy with high and solemn thoughts, they lose sight of the dignity and splendour of human life, and hence what appears to be an indifference to religion becomes one of the marked features of the age.

Again, there is a tendency to complete dissatisfaction with materialism as a workable theory of the universe.

The old materialism was satisfied, cheerful, even jubilant. Harriet Martineau speaks of the real joy she found in deliverance from what she called the "decaying mythology" of the Christian religion. She took positive pleasure in the thought of its approaching annihilation. She, and those who thought with her, announced as a sort of gospel to mankind struggling in the wilderness, that the promised land was a mirage and they expected mankind to welcome the intelligence. That was the spirit of the old materialism; the later materialism is full of incurable despair and sadness. It is no longer sure that it is right. It is no longer able to disguise

the truth that there are a hundred things in earth and heaven which were not dreamed of in its philosophy. It has fired its last shot, and the fortresses of faith still stand: it has announced the promised land a mirage, and yet mankind follows the pillar of cloud and fire; and in the heart of the materialist of to-day there is a new yearning toward faith, an ardent wish to believe more than his reason will permit him to believe.

And there is an equal dissatisfaction with agnosticism. Men have come to see that it is not doubts that count but beliefs. They have come to see that it is debilitating to both character and conduct to rule life by negatives. It is not the Everlasting Nay by which man lives, but the Everlasting Yea. Even to the agnostic it has become apparent that to believe the least fraction of a truth with vigorous sincerity will carry a man further toward the heights of human achievement than the denial of a hundred errors.

Here, then, are three tendencies of our own time, so general, that they cannot but be felt by many. Lives are being degraded, careers are being blighted, souls are being lost every day, not by indulgence in gross vices, but by the depression of the spiritual instinct, the lack of high belief, the feebleness and uncertainty of such belief as is held: and behold to you Christ



comes with the great words, He that believes on Me shall live: he that believes shall be saved. If ever there was a Gospel for the age, this is the Gospel. If ever there was a challenge which rings straight home to the innermost citadel of the spirit, this is the challenge. The question is: what does this Gospel of belief really mean? how can it be justified? how can we bring ourselves to receive it?

Manifestly the first question to be asked is: What is Belief, in the Christian sense of the term?

Belief, in the Christian sense of the term, is reliance upon the intuitions rather than upon the reason. With the heart man believes unto righteousness.

Look at the whole method of Christ's teaching and you will see at once what this definition means. Has it ever struck you that the silences and the omissions in the teachings of Christ are remarkable? He does not attempt to prove the existence of God, He takes it for granted. He does not offer a single argument for the existence of the soul, or the prolongation of human destiny beyond the earth, or the certainty of an unseen spiritual world. He shows us a publican at prayer—that is His way of proving the existence of a soul. He shows us Dives and Lazarus—that is His way of making us aware of the immortal destinies of man, and of his re-

lation to an unseen world. Why is Christ silent upon the arguments which make for these great convictions? Because He knows that no argument can give them cogency. They lie outside the reason. They are witnessed to by the intuitions of mankind. It is to these intuitions that Christ appeals, and His appeal was justified by the astonishing fact that while men eagerly disputed His teachings upon conduct, the worst man never disputed His fundamental assumptions of the existence of God, of the soul, and of an unseen place of judgment behind the veils of time. Christ in His own perfection and purity of life, suggests God; the publican at prayer vindicates the soul, for mankind from the beginning of the ages, has been a creature conscious of a need for prayer; and the inequalities of life displayed in Dives and Lazarus, suggest a spiritual universe where wrong is righted, and final justice done upon mankind.

You will perhaps say that this is to beg the entire case; and so it would be, if man were no more than a rational creature. But man is an irrational as well as a rational creature, and all that is noblest in him springs from a kind of redeeming irrationality. Love, heroism, martyrdom, are all acts of sublime irrationality. Put to the test, we refuse to be governed wholly by our reason, and we refuse every day. A man who never thought or acted, save upon the

full consent of his reason, would be a sorry creature, and his life a dismal spectacle. There is a logic of the heart which is stronger than the logic of the reason. No logic of the reason could justify George Eliot, who had repudiated Christianity as vigorously as Harriet Martineau, in reading Thomas à Kempis all her life, and having the immortal meditations of the old monk beside her bedside as she died; but the logic of the heart justified her, and we love her for submitting to it. What had she, a woman who thrust aside all the theologies as incredible, to do with a Dinah Morris preaching Christ crucified upon a village green? Yet she does paint Dinah Morris, and through the lips of the Methodist evangelist she lets her own soul utter a message which her intellect rejected. There is no justification in reason for the saying of Tennyson, that he would be sorely afraid to live his life without God's presence, for he believed that if God withdrew His presence from the universe but for one instant "Every atom of the creation, both animate and inanimate, would come utterly to nought"; but there is justification in those intuitions that lie behind and rise above reason. Here, then, is the first great helpful thought for you who find the whole theory of belief incredible; you are not asked to believe with the mind, but with the heart. It is not argument but intuition that makes the

Christian believer. Faith is a venture, the venture of the soul, in opposition to the reason. There is something in each one of us, in the child at his mother's knee, in the savage at his prayers, in the brilliant woman of genius still reading Thomas à Kempis in spite of philosophic doubt, something to which Christ appeals, and when we act upon that inner witness we believe in truths which the mind rejects. With the heart, not with the mind, we believe unto righteousness; and he that so believes is saved, he that disbelieves is condemned.

That is the first helpful thought about Belief; the next is, that all belief in the Christian sense, narrows itself down to belief in the spiritual nature of man, and of the universe.

To Martha Christ puts one question and submits but one article of faith: "He that believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live: believest thou this?" Believeth thou what? That Lazarus even now is something more than decaying dust in the charnel-house. It all hinges there—is Lazarus, is man, only so much matter liable to disruption and dispersion, or is he spirit? Is the dust in the charnel-house Lazarus, or is the real Lazarus even now existent, a spirit who can once more, if God should so will it, re-enter the broken house of flesh? To believe that is to accept all that is fundamental in Christianity. There is but one real issue to be fought: it is

between faith and unfaith, the material or the spiritual nature of man. Decide that, and all is decided. If there is a real spiritual nature in man, an immaterial body as the Egyptians thought, a surviving essence as the Buddhist thought, a personality not subject to death, as Mr. Myers has sought to prove by scientific evidence, in his great book upon the subject, then the existence of God, the divine mission of Jesus, the Resurrection in the Garden, and the future life of man, are all probable, credible, and even inevitable truths; if there is no such spiritual essence in man, they are all manifest fictions.

I press this point, because it is the real pivot of belief, and also because when belief is in discussion, it is usually theological dogmas that are attacked, while this, the main point, is commonly overlooked. Thus, for example. Mr. Cotter Morison attacks the story of the Fall, and says that man has not fallen, but risen, and that being so, the whole theory of redemption is disproved. Mr. Blatchford, again, in his articles in the *Clarion*, which have attracted so much attention, suggests a long series of theological puzzles, ranging from the Immaculate Conception to the meaning of Hell and Heaven. Other adversaries of the Christian faith of an earlier generation, Huxley, for example, picked out certain Miracles for discussion and deri-

sion, and sought to make them the test questions of the Christian faith. None of these matters are cardinal. Christ suggests but one question as cardinal: do you grant or do you not grant the spiritual nature of man? Is the child, the wife, the parent you have lost quite dissolved into nothingness? Is it Lazarus that lies in the tomb, or merely some cast-off raiment which Lazarus once wore, and wears no more, because he is a spirit in the bosom of God? What do you really believe about these dead folk who loved you? If you reply that for you the thought of the extinction of personality is absurd, if you really believe that death is but a phase, a parenthesis, an interruption in the continuity of life, and that your dead child, or wife, or parent, exists at this moment in some condition not intelligible to the physical senses, then you have granted the fundamental truth of the Christian religion. You have asserted the spiritual nature of man; you have allowed your intuition to override your reason; you have trusted the logic of the heart against the logic of the intellect, and that is the essence of Belief.

It is because Christ thus narrows belief to this single issue that He simplifies it too. Neither the criticism of Mr. Cotter Morison upon the Fall, nor the theological conundrums of Mr. Blatchford, nor the attack on miracles of Huxley, shake my faith, because my faith



does not rest on these things. I may or may not hold by these things; my acceptance or rejection of them does not touch the root-principle of my faith. I do not believe that Christ will condemn any man for rejecting the story of the Fall, or for refusing credence to this or that theological dogma, or for rejecting the evidence of miracles. The thing that does condemn a man is disbelief in his own soul. The thing that saves a man is belief in his own soul. How far that belief may go, or what it may include, will vary; but the abiding and invariable factor of belief is this belief in man as a creature with a soul.

Believest thou this?—that though a man die yet shall he live—that is the great fundamental of belief, that is the real root of faith, that is the supreme miracle of the universe; and when we can accept this cardinal truth that God made man in His own image, and breathed into him a living and immortal soul, no lesser question of theological controversy need disturb us.

But it will follow as a matter of course, that in believing large things we shall also be enabled to believe lesser things. Christ continually taught that knowledge comes through faith; we do not know in order to believe, but we believe in order that we may know. He who does the will of God knows if the doctrine be true. He who submits himself to the great

venture and experience of faith, finds that belief grows by believing. For faith is not a state of mind but a mode of action—he that believes, and is *baptised*. Belief is not assent to a truth, it is willingness to act upon moral and spiritual intuition, to be baptised. The cardinal error of many of you lies there perhaps; you believe feebly because you will not act on your professed belief. You will make the venture of thought, but not the venture of conduct. You admit the existence of a soul within you, but you do not live as though you had a soul. And therefore Christ tells you that the only way to find a faith true is to live as though it were true. Believe, and be baptised, and then belief will save you. Set about the great task of living as a spiritual creature, and the range of your spiritual perceptions will widen. A truth lived is the only kind of truth that is authoritative to the mind and conscience, and he who does live his truth rarely fails to find his truth becoming wider, deeper, surer, by the mere act of reducing it to practice.

And now I put it to you whether there is not a real saving force in faith? Suppose you have a faith no wider in its scope, no more varied in its elements, than faith in the bare fact of the human soul, will not that faith save you if you will dare to rule your life by it? It will save you from materialism, that deadliest foe of

man, for if you believe in your own soul you must seek to live not after the flesh, but after the spirit. It will save you from the corruption and pollution of the world, for yours will be the self-reverence and the pure idealism, which must needs love the highest when you see it. It will save you from despair at the grave, for you will recognise yourself as a creature fitted for immortal destinies. And as you live by such a faith, you will find it always drawing its circle wider. It will soon come to include Christ, for there will be nothing incredible in the thought of God revealed in Christ, since God is revealed in all men. It will include the Resurrection of Christ, for if man be a spirit, whose real life lies not in the body, but in the soul, it will no longer seem incredible that one should rise from the dead. It will include the vision of a far-off Eternity, for he who has eternity within his heart, cannot doubt that he is the heir of things unseen. At every stage of life faith will prove your salvation. He that believes in high things is saved from the tyranny of low things; he that believes in God is saved from the snare of the Evil One. And he that believes not is condemned. He is condemned not by any arbitrary tribunal, but at the bar of his own better nature; he condemns himself to a low, and poor, and mean, and perhaps a wicked life by his own refusal to believe the witness of his

own spirit. For the real cause of ruin in a thousand lives around us is not crime or vice or lust, which are secondary causes only; the primary cause is the lack of that strong and living faith which lifts men above the power of vice or lust, by enabling them to live as seeing things that are invisible. The old evangelistic watchword, "Only believe," has a truer sanction than we imagine, for belief is the key of conduct, and Christ states a truth, sanctioned by the long history and experience of men upon the earth through all ages, when He says, "He that believes shall be saved, and he that disbelieves shall be condemned."

My brethren, Christ waits even now to teach you the mystery and joy of faith. He bids you come to Him, doubts and all, even as He did not turn away from the man who cried, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief." Concerning those doubts, whatever they may be, I would counsel you to weigh Bacon's wise word, "A little philosophy inclines men to atheism; but depth of philosophy bringeth men's minds back to religion." I would beg you to have some regard for that enormous mass of testimony, drawn from more than nineteen centuries of Christian history, to the real power of faith to inspire the noblest lives, before you turn your face from Christ. I speak to you as the ambassador of Christ, I plead with you for your

own soul. The time must come, and come soon, when, to quote the phrase of a great materialistic writer, we must "pass out into the midnight." But there is no midnight for the Christian, for Christ has turned the darkness into everlasting light. The deepening shadows of the earthly evening do but reveal the more clearly the divine stars of faith. I preach to you what I have found true amid a thousand difficulties and temptations, that faith saves; and I make my confession that all I am I owe to the faith I have learned through Jesus Christ. And so I have but one message to proclaim, and may God give us all grace to receive it—He that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned.

## XIV

### CHRIST AMONG THE COMMON THINGS OF LIFE

*(Published in the "Brooklyn Eagle" on the Saturday  
preceding the Mission at Plymouth Church.)*

**M**Y subject is "Christ Among the Common Things of Life." The texts on which I wish to base my address are from John xxi. 9: "As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread"; and John xxi. 12: "And Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine."

I cannot read these words without indulging for a moment in a reminiscence. Not long ago, in the early morning, while all the world slept, I stood beside the Sea of Tiberias, just as the morning mist lifted, and watched a single brown-sailed fishing boat making for the shore, and the tired fishermen dragging their net to land. In that moment it seemed to me as if more than the morning mist lifted—twenty centuries seemed to melt like mist, and the last chapter of St. John's Gospel seemed to enact itself anew before my eyes. For so vivid was the sense of something familiar in the scene, so



mystic was the hour, that I should scarce have been surprised had I seen a fire of coals burning on the shore, and heard the voice of Jesus inviting these tired fishermen to come and dine.

Now I felt that, if I was sensible of the haunting presence of Christ by that Galilean shore, how much more these disciples, in whose minds every aspect of the Galilean lake was connected with some intimate and thrilling memory of the ministry of Jesus. Northward, as the morning mist lifted, the eye beheld the white outline of Capernaum, that city of Christ's second miracle, when at a word the child of a certain nobleman was made whole—Capernaum, that hostile and incredulous city, of which Christ said, “Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be thrust down to hell.”

Immediately on the other side of the lake lay the country of the Gergesenes, where Jesus had met the two demoniacs; where, again, He had found a hostile people, who had besought Him to leave their coasts. Behind the town of Tiberias itself rose the green hills over which wound the road to Nazareth of Galilee—those hills on which the Sermon on the Mount was preached, and where Christ had fed the multitude—and just beyond their rounded ridge the town of the first miracle, where He had turned the water into wine.

Why do I recall these miracles? Because each has one significance, each reveals Christ among the common things of life. And that appears to me the great feature of this beautiful resurrection story. Christ once more stands among the common things of life; the fire, the fish, the bread—all common things; a group of tired, hungry fishers—all common men; and He is there to affirm that in His resurrection He has not broken His bond with men, but strengthened it—wherever common life goes on there is Jesus still.

Notice the words with which the story opens, and you will see at once that this is the real clue to its interpretation. “When the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.” A strange thing that! Why did they not know Him? Because they were not looking for Him in such a scene. It had seemed a natural thing, if Jesus should appear at all, that He should appear in the Garden, a vision of life at the very altar of death. It seemed yet more probable and appropriate that He should appear in the upper room, that room made sacred by holiest love and memory. If any words of Christ yet lingered in the mind, and had power to thrill these men they were surely these words: “Ye shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven,” glorified, triumphant, lifted

far above the earth and its humble life. And so, if they were looking for Christ at all that morning, I think they watched the morning clouds, expecting Him to come down the resplendent staircase of the sunbeams to call the nations together, and vindicate Himself in acts of universal judgment. And behold, Jesus comes as a fisherman, standing by the lakeside, busy over a little fire, where the morning meal is cooking; and behold Jesus speaks, and it is not of the eternal mysteries of God, not of the solemn secrets of the grave, but of nets and fishing and how to cast the nets—the simple concerns of simple men engaged in simple tasks.

No wonder they did not recognise Him. Once more the Son of Man comes eating and drinking, and even the eyes that knew Him best cannot see in this human figure by the lakeside the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. They looked and saw but a fellow-fisherman, cooking his meal upon the shore, and they knew not that it was Jesus.

Think for a moment of the earthly life of Christ, and you will see that it was designedly linked with all the common, and even the commonest, things of life.

If you or I could have conceived the great thought of some human creature who should be the very incarnation of God, what would have been the shape of our imaginings? Surely we

should have chosen for this earthly temple of the highest some human form, perfected in grace and beauty by the long refinement of exalted ancestry; the child of kings or scholars; the delicate flower of life in whom the elements were so subtly mixed that we should recognise them as special and miraculous—so we might think of God manifest in man. But God chooses for the habitation of His Spirit a peasant woman of Nazareth, humble, poor, and unconsidered.

If we could have forecast the training of such a life how should we have pictured it? Surely as sheltered from the coarseness of the world, delicately nourished, sedulously cultured; but God orders that this life should manifest itself in the house of the village carpenter, out of reach of schools, in a little, wicked town, under the commonest conditions of poverty, obscurity, and toil.

If you and I could have imagined the introduction of this life of lives to the world how should we picture that? Surely we should have pictured it coming with pomp and display that would at once have attracted all eyes; but God orders that it shall come without observation, unfolding its quiet beauty like the wayside flower, which there are few to see and very few to love. Commonness: that is the great note of the incarnation and the purposed feature of

Christ's earthly life. He sleeps in huts where poor men lie; He wins His difficult bread as poor men win it. His friends and disciples are fishermen; the princes of His nation know Him not, and when He lifts His hands to bless the multitude they are the hands of the workman, disfigured by daily toil; and when men and women touch His raiment for miraculous healing it is the common raiment of the workman that He wears. From first to last it is among the common things of life He moves, amidst misery and want, the realities of disease, suffering, and death; never picking His path to avoid the thorns and mire of life; by preference walking on the roads most thronged by common people; asking no better title than that sweet and homely title of the Son of Man, desiring no loftier commendation than to be called the Friend of Publicans and Sinners, imagining no sweeter witness to His ministry than that the common people hear Him gladly. He is the people's Christ, the Christ of Common Life—that is His distinction, that is His characteristic, that is His claim.

Think of these things, then, and you will begin to see why it was that Jesus stood upon the shore, as a simple fisherman, talking to fishermen, and so like themselves that they knew not that it was Jesus. He reaffirms His fraternity in common life. The disciples could not im-

agine that as possible; nor can we. And why not? For two reasons, one of which is that we have forgotten the dignity of common life. Dignity is for us almost synonymous with some kind of separation from common life; it dwells in palaces, not in cottages; it inheres in culture, but is inconceivable in narrow knowledge, and to the great mass of men it is, alas! the attribute of wealth, of fine raiment, of social isolation. But we have not learned even the alphabet of Christ's Gospel unless we have come to see that the only true indignity in human life is sin, meanness, malevolence, and small-heartedness, and that all life is dignified where there is love, purity, and piety in it, whatever be its social category.

I read the other day that it is probable that the very mire of the London streets contains that mysterious substance known as radium, the most tremendous agent of light and heat ever yet discovered by man; and so in man himself, however low his state, there is the spark of God, an ember lit at the altar fires of the Eternal, and it is because we forget this that we forget the dignity of common life. For we do forget it. We may make our boast that a single human soul is of more value than all the splendours and immensities of matter; but in our actions we treat the boast as a mere rhetorical expression. There is nothing so cheap as men and women—



let the lords of commerce answer if it be not so. But Christ acted as though the boast were true. He deliberately inwove His life into all that is commonest in life. He has made it impossible for us—if, indeed, we have His Spirit—to think of any common aspect of human life without thinking of Him.

We all recollect that pathetic and striking saying of Abraham Lincoln's, that God must have thought a good deal of the common people, because He made so many of them. Jesus acted as though that saying were true. He preferred to be numbered with the poor, with the humble, with the obscure toilers, who had no inheritance on the earth. He desired not to share the life of the privileged, but preferred association in the life of the unprivileged. He sought not what all men seek—possessions; rather, He sought, and taught His followers to seek to be delivered from the burden of possessions. It was the divine mission of the Christ, who was Himself a root out of a dry ground, to show how the Flower of the Soul could grow in the common soil of humanity, where no man expected grace, or perfume, or beauty. And so the great mission of Christ is to make us see the dignity of common life, and the Church that forgets this has neither impulse nor mandate for Christ's work among men.

And then, again, there is a second reason why

this passage startles us; we have not learned to look for Christ among the common things of life.

“Let us build three tabernacles,” said the wondering disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, and the speech betrayed a tendency of thought which was in time to prove fatal to the Church.

The Christ without a tabernacle, the free, familiar Christ of the lake or the wayside was everybody’s Christ; but the moment Christ is shut up in a church or a tabernacle He becomes the priest’s Christ, the thinker’s Christ, the devotee’s Christ, but He ceases to be the people’s Christ.

I remember five years ago standing in the great Church of Assisi, which has been erected over and encloses the little humble chapel where Francis first received his call. You will scarcely be surprised if I confess that I turned with a sense of heart-sick indignation from the pomp of that splendid service in the gorgeous church to the thought of Francis, in his worn robe, going up and down these neighbouring roads, touching the lepers, calling them “God’s patients,” pouring out his life for the poor, and I knew Christ nearer to me on the roads that Francis trod than in that Church which is his mausoleum rather than his monument. And as I felt that day in far-off Umbria, so I have felt

to-day in England; my heart goes out to Catherine Booth, to Father Dolling, to these Christs of the wayside, and it turns more and more from the kind of Christ who lives in churches, and nowhere else. My brethren, will you let me say that we do but make the Church Christ's prison when we forget that all the realm of life is His? Oh, you good people, who do love your Church, but often think and act as though the presence of Christ can be found nowhere else—lift up your eyes and see this Risen Christ, a fisherman upon the shore, busy in no loftier task than to have a meal prepared for hungry fishermen. Unlock your Church doors, let Christ go out among the common people; nay, go yourselves, for it is there that He would have you be. Remember, that wherever there is toil, there is the Christ who toiled, and there you should be, with the kind glance, the warm hand-grasp and the living warmth of brotherhood. Remember, that wherever hunger is, there is the Christ who thinks it no sacrilege that hands that have bled upon the Cross, and laid hold of the glory of God, should cook a meal for hungry men. Remember, that wherever there is buying and selling, there is the Christ interested in the draught of fishes, ready to instruct you in your business, as He instructed these men to cast the net on the right side of the ship. And your religion is vain if it does not enable you to see

Christ in the counting-house, in the 'change, in the office, in the warehouse, as truly as in the church.

Christ stands amid the common things of life; where the fire is lit, there is He; where the bread is broken, there is He; where the net of business gain is drawn, there is He; and only as we learn to see Him everywhere shall we understand the dignity and the divinity of human life.

*“ And Jesus said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.”*

Here is another strange thing. Christ knows more about the management of their own business than they do. They had toiled all night and caught nothing; is not that a significant description of many human lives? “ Children, have ye any meat? ” asks that quiet voice from the shore, and they answer “ No.” Is not that yet more pathetically significant? All the heart-break and disappointment of the world cries aloud in that confession. Oh, I could fill an hour with the mere recital of the names of great and famous people who have toiled through a long life, and as the last grey hour came over the dim sea of life, “ brackish with the salt of human tears,” have acknowledged with infinite bitterness that they have caught nothing. Lis-

ten to the voice of Goethe, " In all my seventy-five years I have not had four weeks of genuine well being "; to the confession of our own famous poet—

" My life is in the yellow leaf,  
The flowers, the fruits of love are gone;  
The worm, the canker, and the grief  
Are mine alone ";

to the ambitious and successful statesman, who says, " Youth is folly, manhood is struggle, old age regret "; to one of the most brilliant women of genius in our own generation, wife of a still more brilliant husband, who cries, " I married for ambition, and I am miserable." Surely there is some tragic mismanagement of the great business of living here. Oh, brother, is it true of you that after all the painful years happiness is not yours? You have no meat, no food on which the heart feeds, no green pasture in the soul, no table in the wilderness, and the last grey day draws near, and will find you still hungering for what life has never given you.

Learn, then, that Christ knows more about the proper management of your life than you do. " Cast your net on the right side of the ship," speaks that quiet voice from the shore. And you know what happened. These men, poor and disappointed, are suddenly enriched and satisfied when they rule their actions by Christ's word. Guided by their own will and

their own wisdom, they have been miserably poor fishermen—they have caught nothing. They need the Master of the tides and the Lord of the deep to instruct them. The moment they submit to the directions of Christ, failure becomes victory, and success comes to them across the dawn-lit sea. And it is so still. Just because Christ stands among the common things of life, He knows all about life, and, above all, He knows where the golden fruit of happiness is found, and where the secret wells of peace are.

There is a thought which overwhelms me at times—have you ever felt its pain?—that we know so little about life, we understand so little of the mechanism of our own nature. We are always experimenting and always going wrong in our experiments. But Christ knows; He makes no mistakes. Life for Him is no experiment, no riddle, no doubtful enigma: He knows. And His summary of life is, “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye have peace. Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.” You may think you know all about the business of life; test your knowledge by this question, “Have ye any meat?” Is the heart satisfied, and the soul nourished and at rest? And if that test declares you bankrupt in all that makes the true joy of life, oh listen even now to the Voice which speaks as never man spake, and “cast



your net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find."

For some of us whom God has called to be fishers of men the issue is yet more solemn. We have the boat and the nets, all this elaborate organisation of the Church, but have we caught anything this year? Where is the draught of fishes? Where are the men and women saved by our triumphant effort? I will make my humble confession, that for five-and-twenty years I have cast the net, but not always have I found the right side of the ship; only lately have I discovered how easy it is to get the great draught of fishes by simply going to work in Christ's way. I do not believe in the indifference of the masses to religion; the indifference is not in the masses, but in the Churches. You will never catch many fish if you stand upon the shore of cold respectability, and wait for them to come; launch out into the deep, and you will find them. Go for them, that is Christ's method. Compel them to come in, for remember Christ's ideal was, as Bishop Lightfoot so nobly put it, "the universal compulsion of the souls of men." And if your experience is like mine, you will find that there is strangely little compulsion needed to bring men and women to Christ. We have not far to go to seek the lost sheep; and the sheep is more anxious to return to the fold than we to open the gate of the fold to receive him. One of

the amazements of my life has been to discover with what readiness men will respond to any real and sincere effort made to win them for Christ. If they stand aloof from the Church it is usually because they think the Church does not want them. I ask you whether you really want a great draught of fishes, for you can have them if you want them. Christ knows the business better than you do; and if you will come out of the cloister of the Church and seek the people in His spirit, I promise you that very soon you will not be able to draw the net for the multitude of fishes.

“*And Jesus said unto them, Come and dine.*”

Dine on what? Not the fish which they had caught. They had caught one hundred and fifty-three great fishes; but notice, Christ's fire was kindled before they came. Christ's fish was already laid thereon, and all they had to do was to come and dine. It is all you have to do, all the Churches have to do. Did not Christ so put it in the parable of the great supper?—“Come, for all things are now ready.” Is not the last word of Scripture the great invitation—“The Spirit and Bride say Come, and whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.” Many a Church cannot say to a hungry world, “Come and dine,” because it will not let Christ prepare the meal. It will not live in His Spirit, it has no real faith in His Gospel:

it does not understand that its true strength is not in elaborate organisation or worship, but in reliance on His grace. And so there is the table covered with elaborate confections which are not bread, and when it says, "Come and dine," men will not come, for they know that there is nothing there for them. Let Christ prepare the meal, and all is different then. When He says, "Come and dine," there is "enough for each, enough for all, enough for evermore." And as Jesus spoke, I think there flashed upon the memory of these men the scene when Jesus fed the five thousand, and by that memory they knew their Jesus. No one else had ever spoken like that, with such certainty and such authority. And the same voice speaks even now to your hunger-bitten soul, to your famished heart, "Come and dine."

*"Then Jesus taketh bread and giveth them, and fish likewise."*

There is no mistaking the act, it was a sacramental act. Here, upon the lake shore, without a church, without an altar, the true feast of the Lord was observed. For what does the Holy Supper, which is the bond and seal of the Church's fellowship, stand for, if it is not for this, the sanctification of the common life? Bread and wine, the commonest of all foods to an Oriental, elements indeed, because they are necessary to the most elementary form of physi-

cal life, things used daily in the humblest home—by linking Himself imperishably with these commonest elements of life, Christ makes it impossible to forget Him. Once more the thought shines clear—Jesus among the common things of life. And then there comes one last touch in the beautiful story. All the time, while these things happened, the day was breaking. Is there one of us long tossed on sunless seas of doubt, long conscious of failure and disappointment in life? Are there those of us whose sorrow lies deeper than that which is personal, sorrow over our failure in Christ's work, pain over a life's ministry for Christ, that has known no victorious evangel?

Turn your eyes from that barren sea to Him who stands upon the shore; He shall yet make you a fisher of men. Turn your eyes from that bleak, dark sea of wasted effort, where you have fared so ill; it is always dark till Jesus comes, it is always light when He has come. There is a new day breaking for the Churches—a day of widespread evangelistic triumph that shall eclipse all the greatest triumphs of the past, if we will but go back to Christ's school, and learn of Him how to save the people. And to each of us He says to-day, "I am the living bread; I am the bread of life come down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for evermore." "Come and dine." Will you come?

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